As Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory’s lead administrator, my overriding objective for the past 15 years has been consistent: to create the structure that a rapidly growing enterprise requires to operate efficiently and deal with increasing regulation, without compromising a uniquely productive academic culture. Although not listed on the balance sheet, the Laboratory’s culture is its most valuable asset.

In 1968, Jim Watson began establishing a culture at Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory carefully designed to foster collaboration, intensity, entrepreneurship, risk-taking, productivity, and, above all, excellence. In other words, an environment ideally suited to doing great science. This culture endures. It has been carried forward by Bruce Stillman and is sustained by many “culture carriers” here, be they facilities personnel, educators, or elite research investigators. We understand what makes the institution special and we work hard to preserve it. This work is not without challenges that sometimes shift unpredicatably. Initially, my objective was to preserve culture in an environment characterized by extraordinary growth—the doubling of the National Institutes of Health (NIH) budget and substantial expansion of infrastructure and scientific staff here at the Laboratory. Now we face the opposite challenge—adjusting to a dramatic decline in federal funding that threatens America’s superiority in basic science and biomedical research.

Administratively, we must make difficult decisions in response. Aggressive expense management has become a constant. Annual cost-of-living increases are no longer a given. For the first time, the decision was made to cut back on nonresearch positions at the Laboratory. This causes human hardship and puts more pressure on our dedicated staff. Culture preservation becomes an issue of maintaining morale and optimism in an increasingly difficult environment—a very different kind of managerial challenge.

Fortunately, we are benefiting from healthy growth in our endowment funds. This results from three factors: strong appreciation in public equities since the financial crisis in 2008, a revised investment strategy implemented by the Laboratory’s Investment Committee during the last several years, and generous philanthropic donations to endowment. Return on investment for the 2013 calendar year was +16.5%, placing us in the upper performance tier of university endowments. Year-end market value was $385 million, another all-time high for the Laboratory. In addition, we are fortunate to have booked another $80 million in endowment pledges receivable to date through fund-raising. The importance to the future of the institution of increasing endowment cannot be overstated and remains atop our list of priorities.

Our research and education programs remain strong. We continue to attract the very best faculty, postdocs, and students. These strengths manifest in higher than average success rates with federal grant awards. This, combined with substantial private support and a growing endowment, allows the academic programs to move forward unencumbered. We are more excited than ever about the quality and progress of our work and its promise for human health.

Our community is a cohesive one. We work hard to maintain the culture that has and continues to make Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory so productive, and we do so now in the face of some daunting challenges. We are fond of saying that “science never sleeps.”

W. Dillaway Ayres, Jr.
Chief Operating Officer
Staff
(Consists of full-time and part-time technical support, core services, publications, meetings, library, public affairs, buildings and grounds, administrative, personnel, Banbury Center, and DNA Learning Center)

Meetings & Courses Participants
(Year 2010 forward includes CSH Asia and Banbury Center meetings.)

Operating expense
(Actual expense and Expense adjusted for inflation)
Long-Term Service

The following employees celebrated milestone anniversaries in 2013:

45 years  James Watson
35 years  Patricia Maroney, Christopher McEvoy, Michael Wigler
30 years  Margaret Falkowski, Daniel Jusino
25 years  Maryliz Dickerson, Grigori Enikolopov, Ronnie Packer, Francis Bowdren, Margot Bennett, Salvador Henriquez, Margaret Stellabotte, Jeffrey Goldblum, Arne Stenlund
20 years  David Stewart, Wayne Pav, Deborah Aufiero, Patricia Brady
15 years  Paul Edwards, Jesus Magana, Louis Hunter, Amanda McBrien, Michael Riggs, Drew Comer, Jeffrey Klaiverweiden, Sabrina Boettcher, Thomas McIlvaine, W. Dillaway Ayres, Marja Timmermans, Ming Wang, Lari Russo, Susana Roman, Lifang Zhang