

Dear friends,

Welcome to this first edition of the **Meet Your SRBT Board Member** newsletter. As SRBT Vice President, I was tasked to introduce this new resource to our members, and invite you all to participate in the process of direct democracy at SRBT by reaching out to the leaders with your concerns, questions, ideas, and projects.

We are going to start introducing SRBT leaders to our membership, so that you know more about us, our backgrounds, and interests. Naturally, we welcome any additional questions that you may have for us.

So please meet the first group of the SRBT leaders.

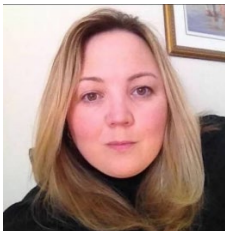
Note: Eva Schenkman takes the prize for the coolest extracurricular activity. Read on. You will agree with me.



Marina Gvakharia, MD, PhD,
HCLD/ELD(ABB), CLS(CA), MT(ABOR),
SRBT Vice President and the ad-hoc
editor of your newsletter.
Current place of work: Palo Alto
Medical Foundation, Sutter Health,
California.



Liesl Nel-Themaat, PhD, HCLD(ABB),
SRBT President,
Current place of work: IVF lab
Director and Clinical Associate
Professor Stanford School of
Medicine Fertility and Reproductive
Health



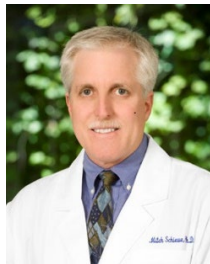
Eva Schenkman, MS, PhD, TS (ABB),
CLT(NY)
SRBT Chair Nominations Committee
Current place of work:
ARTLAB Consulting



Wayne Caswell, MS, TS (ABB), CLS
(NCA)
SRBT Secretary
Current place of work: Donor Egg
Bank USA



David M. Russell, B.S. TS(ABB)
SRBT Representative to the SART
Executive Committee Shady Grove
Current place of work:
Fertility (SGF) Colorado, Denver.



Mitchel C. Schiewe, BS, MS, PhD,
HCLD/ELD (ABB)
SRBT Research Committee Chairman
Current place of work:
Scientific Lab Director-Ovation
Fertility-Newport Beach & California
Fertility Partners-Los Angeles

How did you end up in this amazing field of ours?

Marina: Upon completion of my MD and PhD degrees and training, I was still unsure who I wanted to become once I grow up (Late bloomer. I know). Until I set my foot at the IVF laboratory at Baylor college of Medicine that is. Right there and then I knew that I have arrived, and I never looked back.

Liesl: I came from the animal side. I was fortunate to be one of the Repro Rangers, studying under Bob Godke at LSU's Embryo Biotech Lab and working with exotic species at Audubon Nature Institute.

Eva: My undergraduate advisor, the late, Robert H Foote PhD, one of the early IVF pioneers in Animal Science, he introduced me to this field as a sophomore at Cornell.

Wayne: As most I was on another path with a BS in Microbiology and a plan to become an Infectious Disease MD. I got a job at a fertility clinic and the rest is history.

David: I wanted to demo an injector to use in the mouse stem cell lab (we were using very old syringes or mouth pipettes) and Dawn Kelk had the demo injector in her IVF lab at the university. When I called to see when she would be done with it, she asked why I needed it and after hearing about my lab experience, asked if I wanted a job. I said no but when I went to pick it up from her, she said I should check out the lab and reconsider. I did and that was the beginning of human IVF for me.

Mitchel: As high school student in 1974, I learned about importation of Exotic Breed (European) Cattle into the USA via the ligated oviducts of rabbits incubating blastocysts recovered from superovulated cows in Canada. As senior undergrad at UC Davis, I attended IETS conference and heard two inspirational talks by Steen Wiladsen on Experimental cloning and chimerism and Barbara Durrant on Potential Applications of ET technology to rare species conservation biology. These talks solidified my career focus from Veterinary Medicine-Surgery to Embryology and Conservation Biology.

Who inspired you the most along the way?

Marina: I was blessed with many amazing mentors, but I am especially grateful to Drs. Dorrie Lamb and Pauline Cisneros, as remarkable role models of strong and compassionate women in science and Dr. David Adamson, who instilled religion of the evidence-based medicine into everything I do.

Liesl: Dr. Robert Godke inspired me with his dedication to his students and their futures in the field of Assisted Reproduction, showing how powerful it can be to educate the next generation and how it can impact our field. Later and still today, I have several role models, most notably Dr. Sangita Jindal, who further motivated me to be impactful by having the courage to take on challenging roles and help be the change I want to see, and to speak up and advocate for others who may not feel they are in a position to do so. I hope and aspire to be able to pay it forward and to be a role model to others.

Eva: I have been fortunate to be inspired by two remarkable individuals: Robert H Foote, PhD and Jason Swain, PhD. Both are truly remarkable scientists, and words cannot express how grateful I am for their generosity and support over the years. Thank you for being great mentors and teachers.

Wayne: I have been privileged to work with many outstanding doctors and laboratory professionals, but Michael Tucker Ph. D is my primary mentor.

David: I have had the best group of lab directors as my direct supervisors. Each one has been amazing in their own way. Dawn, Shunping, Sangita and Liesl have all been advocates for everyone in the lab and I consider them all good friends and family.

Mitchel: Blessed with 3 great academic mentors: GB Anderson (UC Davis), RA Godke (LSU) and DE Wildt (National Zoo/NIH); as well as a Cryobiology mentor/friend in William F. Rall (vitrification pioneer).

Scientifically: I was most inspired by the micromanipulation research of Sir Richard Gardner and fellows/students like Martin Johnson, Janet Rossant, MA Surani and others

Clinically: I was fortunate to befriend Jacques Cohen, Mina Alikani and Michael Tucker very early in my Human IVF career path; as well as David Gardner a couple years later. All very influential!

What is your favorite laboratory procedure and why?

Marina: I love checking for blastocyst development, as to me this is the closest one gets to seeing budding human life.

Liesl: Testicular sperm harvest: We work with amazing urologists who create a really fun atmosphere in the OR. Each TESE is unique and you never know what you might find. Then when you finally use the sperm, especially for a difficult ICSI and see the whole process through it is very rewarding.

Eva: I have always enjoyed retrievals, not sure why, I just appreciate having that patient interaction at the beginning, answering any questions, making the process less anxiety-producing for them.

Wayne: I have a special affinity for Cryopreservation. I felt with my background it was the area I knew the least about, so I did a lot of reading and practice to master the techniques.

David: Embryo transfers are usually my favorite because I get to see patients who are at an important part in their fertility journey. It's especially fun if I remember the patient from previous cycles who can show me pictures of their IVF kids.

The 2nd favorite is fertilization check. It's always exciting to see the results of the previous day's work.

Mitchel: Micromanipulation, including tool making, was an obsession I developed as a post-doc before entering IVF in 1992. My experimental focus was on making interspecies ET a successful possibility via

ICM transplants /BL reconstitution. This led to my early work with ICSI and laser dissection in clinical IVF.

What is your favorite obsession at work?

Marina: I spend inordinate amount of my time developing safety measures, checks and balances, clear communication channels, and other error prevention processes for my laboratory and our clinic in general. I found these activities central for my role as laboratory director.

Liesl: Color Cording!!!! My team all make fun of me about how serious I am about color coding, patterns and matching to help giving visual cues in the lab. For example, I always use the same color sequence for my CryoLocks when freezing embryos.

Eva: Making sure the floors are clean! Nothing drives me more nuts than dust bunnies. LOL.

Wayne: Quality and elimination or control of variables.

David: Tracking down pregnancy results. I like to annoy the nurses to find out who has tested and when they're having their first ultrasound.

Mitchel: My unique clinical passion has been developing microsecure VTF and optimizing testicular tissue processing/cryopreservation by use of IVC and whole tissue cryopreservation. Also, applied research and publication, and educating young reproductive biologists to ART history

What is your favorite work that you don't get paid for (community service)?

Marina: Helping our youngsters prepare for their TS and HCLD/ELD examinations at ABB by running an online study group that already has over 450 members.

I also enjoy supporting my professional organizations, such as CRB and SRBT in any way I can.

Liesl: Hosting i3 events and serving on the SRBT Board 😊

Eva: New York Metropolitan Embryology Society (NYMES) committee.

Wayne: I donate time to Habitat for Humanity.

David: Working with our local reproductive technologist group (CART). We have fun/educational meetings and it's a chance to see other lab people in our area.

Mitchel: Review manuscripts and write papers.

What do you do for fun?

Marina: Skiing, cooking, reading, book-clubbing with other strong, opinionated, and slightly nerdy women.

Liesl: Snowboarding, making music with my family, running/hiking with my dog and watching my kids participating in their recitals, matches and rock shows.

Eva: Own a Horse Farm.

Wayne: I like to Ski and Motorcycles.

David: Cooking, eating, tennis, playing with my animals (dogs, cat, chickens etc), gardening and hanging out with family and friends.

Mitchel: Love and enjoy my Dogs!

What's your favorite guilty pleasure?

Marina: Reading in bed.

Liesl: Playing Catan against the AIs on my laptop in bed (while I should be doing something productive like homework or studying!

Eva: Wine and Chocolate are equally tied.

Wayne: Food and wine...

David: Having a nice Scotch or bourbon in the evening while sitting on the back patio enjoying warm weather.

Mitchel: Golf Rival e-game.

What do you want to accomplish as a leader at SRBT?

Marina: I want to be useful to our membership by supporting their education and professional development. I would like SRBT to become instrumental in further defining and developing Clinical Embryology into a recognized and defined medical specialty.

Liesl: I would like to bring more unity between the SRBT Board and our ASRM Committee Representatives so that we can be more influential and effective as a society within ASRM. I also would like to inspire others to serve in leadership positions, especially some of our newer colleagues. Finally, I would like SRBT to truly be a voice for the people and listen to what our members want and need from the Board, to build trust and inspire them to get involved.

Eva: Introducing new Embryologists to SRBT.

Wayne: I want to assist the next generation and help our patients and colleagues to do better meaningful work.

David: I would like to help make networking within the field of embryology easier for the average lab technician. Facilitating interactions among all levels of embryologists in the field, from new lab employees to seasoned lab directors. Everyone can learn from these interactions.

Mitchel: Being the founding Chairman to SRBT formation brought me immense satisfaction, and so, any support function I can add today simply reinforces my service commitment to our field. Locally, with the support of SRBT, and especially AAB, I am working with other colleagues to reform CA Lab standards to make Reproductive Biology its own Lab specialty so that CA will conform to CLIA by 2023, supporting PhDs to be Lab Directors and allow Embryologist/Andrologist to perform the whole spectrum of the laboratory procedures covered under CLIA 88.

How can our members get in touch with you?

Marina: By email: gvakhaa@sutterhealth.org

Liesl: Since I will be changing jobs soon, the best is to contact me through the SRBT website.

Eva: By email: Evaschenkman@gmail.com

Wayne: By e-mail at wcaswell@debusa.com or call my cell at 978-518-6399

David: By email at david.russell@sgfertility.com

Mitchel: By email: mschiewe@ovationfertility.com / mitchel@californiafertilitypartners.com