

ACS NEWS

Pitching in

ACS local sections and members are gathering lab equipment, making chemistry-themed face masks, and more to help during the pandemic

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When the COVID-19 pandemic began spreading in the US, Jennifer Marsalla, chair of the American Chemical Society Puget Sound Section, worried about her colleagues in the medical community who lacked access to face masks and other personal protective equipment (PPE).

“I wondered if there was a way to call on our membership within the chemistry community to help our first responders,” Marsalla says. She decided to reach out

tion is also rallying its members to help the community. “We have a very active section, and it’s got a good mix of industry people as well as academic folks and educators,” says Sophia Hayes, chair of section. “We have a mailing list and a membership of almost 1,500 people.”

Some volunteers have helped pick up and deliver donations of PPE and other equipment. Hayes says a local beer-brewing company, where the local section has occasionally gathered for monthly meetings, has donated three industrial-scale hydrometers for use in measuring specific amounts of alcohol for making hand sanitizer.

Others have contributed their chemistry expertise. For example, Hayes assisted industrial hygienists in the Environmental Health and Safety group at the Washington University School of Medicine in fine-tuning their alcohol calibration for hand sanitizers. “They just needed a little bit of chemistry expertise,” she says. “They were using these sets of meters that they weren’t familiar with.”

A similar desire to support the community inspired the North Carolina Section’s Younger Chemists Committee to organize a virtual food drive for the Food Bank of Central and Eastern North Carolina. The group set a goal to raise \$300 in 1 month



Sally Mitchell shows off one of the face masks she made.

but ended up exceeding the goal during the campaign’s first day.

“We were blown away that we reached our goal so quickly,” says Elizabeth Hunsaker, chair of the section’s Younger Chemists Committee. “People realize that food insecurity is a huge problem, especially during a pandemic.”

Hunsaker encourages other local section members to think creatively about how they can make a difference. “If you had events planned, think about ways they can be adapted,” she says. “There are plenty of ways to contribute and connect even if we can’t do it in person.”

Individual ACS members around the country are also pitching in. In New York, for example, high school chemistry teacher Sally Mitchell is using leftover fabric from the celebration of the International Year of the Periodic Table to make chemistry-themed face masks for friends, family, and hospital workers. Louisiana State University chemistry professor John A. Pojman and his graduate student Anthony Mai have helped guide the process of inmates at a local correctional facility making more than 80,000 8 oz (237 mL) bottles of hand sanitizer. And W. Matthew Reichert, a chemistry professor at the University of South Alabama and chair of the ACS Local Section Activities Committee, is 3-D printing face masks and tension bands that make face masks fit more comfortably. So far, he and his colleagues have printed more than 50 face masks and 300 tension bands.

Marsalla says that doing good for the community can be therapeutic. “It’s continuing to inspire people who feel like they’re at a standstill and letting them know that they can still do something to help,” she says. ■



W. Matthew Reichert is making tension bands for face masks using 3-D printing.

to the local section’s roughly 2,600 members to encourage them to donate PPE and other items in short supply to assist health-care professionals in combating COVID-19, the disease caused by the novel coronavirus. After Marsalla sent her letter, several local section members arranged for their universities to donate PPE to local health-care providers.

The ACS Puget Sound Section is among a handful of ACS local sections tapping into their networks to help support those on the front line of the fight against COVID-19. In addition to the local sections’ efforts, individual ACS members are also doing what they can to help, including making face masks and 3-D printing PPE.

In Missouri, the ACS Saint Louis Sec-

Scientists from the Washington University School of Medicine produce hand sanitizer. The ACS Saint Louis Section helped gather analytical lab equipment needed to calibrate the hand sanitizer formulation.

