

From Seattle to San Diego—the Japan Affiliate's 2009 US Plant Tour

by Osamu Matsumoto and Michael Lucey

Following the successful 2008 tour of pharmaceutical plants in the eastern US through to participation in the Boca Raton Annual Meeting, the Japan Affiliate again organized a tour of US plants, but on this occasion traveling the West Coast and concluding the itinerary at the San Diego Annual Meeting. The tour, as an important annual event offered by the Affiliate, not only helps participants broaden their industry knowledge, but also allows for networking among one another as well as with peers in the US. Moreover, the tour and related events underscore for participants the benefits brought by ISPE, and in doing so contribute to increased membership.

The Affiliate's 2009 US Plant Tour Organizing Committee began its planning in June. The Committee led by Shigeru Nakamura and Osamu Matsumoto, together with Masayuki Akutagawa, studied the available options and narrowed down the candidate destinations to plants in Seattle, San Francisco/Fremont, and Los Angeles. In addition to valuable guidance and support from ISPE HQ in Tampa, plant selection for the tour was owed to the personal connections of Mason Waterbury and Michael Lucey, both of whom are Japan-based and served on the Committee. As a result, five plants were contacted for visits in the November 2 to 6 period, and approval received.

The sign-up phase for the tour began in August. The group proved to be a well-balanced total of 17 participants: seven from pharmaceutical companies, seven from engineering and construction companies, and three from equipment manufacturers. During the early preparation, a level of anxiety was expressed about the impact of the globally spreading swine influenza. Fortunately, the tour members were all able to participate, and importantly, destination plants remained unaffected and available to accept the scheduled visits. Sincere appreciation is expressed by the Japan Affiliate for the consideration extended by the hosts, all of whom warmly welcomed their visitors. Each of the plants visited is outlined below.

Amgen Helix (Seattle)

Advanced R&D facility for biotechnology comprising three R&D buildings connected by corridors, arranged with a view toward future expansion. The facility is characterized by an aseismic design and isolation techniques for stable R&D activities with redundancy considered in the utility facilities.

Amgen Fremont (San Francisco/Fremont)

Production plant for antibodies consisting of two trains of culture tanks with a maximum capacity of 10 m³. Transparent partition walls are installed between the facility areas and the walkways for visitors so that all facilities can be viewed.

Bayer HealthCare (San Francisco/Berkeley)

Bio plant for blood products where stable production is maintained throughout in order to obtain just several hundred grams

of products yearly. From a process perspective, the features of the plant are continuous fermentation and harvesting.

Genentech (South San Francisco)

A research facility for the identification of proteins, Building 42 has enabled research work to be accelerated by the introduction of robots and the customization of laboratory equipment.



With Kelly Keen at Genentech in South San Francisco.

Building 43 is a kilo-lab facility working with small molecules, again remarkable for its customized equipment aimed at efficient R&D work.

Baxter BioScience (Los Angeles)

World-leading plant for blood plasma fractionation products. The tour and explanations fully covered the chilled storage of raw materials, to thawing, fractionation, packaging, and sterilization.

A key element of the tour's overall program was the San Francisco/Bay Area Chapter-organized Commuter Conference hosted by Amgen Fremont. With a formal invitation received, the visitors from Japan attended the Conference's guest lectures and joined the plant tour and networking party, as well as a social dinner in the Fremont area. Organized by the San Francisco/Bay Area Chapter, the dinner together was an ideal opportunity for local Chapter and visiting Affiliate to get to know one another and to plan for the future with reciprocity in Japan as a topic also discussed!

In the evenings, having returned to the hotel, members attended daily wrap-up meetings with delegated persons compiling reports on the day spent. Leader Osamu Matsumoto was later to provide a total presentation on the tour to the Japan-based membership at the Affiliate's Winter Meeting held in December 2009 in Osaka.

But it was certainly not all work in the US as the travel itinerary happily included Safeco Stadium in Seattle, wine tasting in the Napa Valley, Universal City in Burbank, the Getty Center in Los Angeles, and of course a wonderful diversity of restaurants to close out each day of a memorable week. A reunion party is now planned in Japan to join the 2008 and 2009 tour members, further expanding the potential for networking. Benefiting from feedback and advice received, planning is already underway for another tour this year with Orlando as the final destination!