

## OUR BOARDS IN ACTION

Each “Our Boards in Action” column highlights a board member at an ASTC-member institution, who shares his or her insights and experiences. We spoke with **Robin L. Davisson**, chair of the Board of Trustees at the **Sciencenter** in Ithaca, New York. Davisson is professor of molecular physiology at Cornell University. Her research focuses on the molecular mechanisms underlying hypertension, heart failure, and pre-eclampsia.

### How did you get involved as a board member of the Sciencenter?

Seven years ago, my husband and I traveled to Ithaca, New York, to discuss our new appointments at Cornell University (my husband’s as president and mine as professor of molecular physiology). When I got back to my office at the University of Iowa, the first call I received at 9:00 a.m. was from Charlie Trautmann, executive director of the Sciencenter. He asked me about visiting the Sciencenter and possibly becoming a board member. I did visit on my next trip to Ithaca and was taken from the first moment with the vision and the team. I’ve been on board ever since.

### What do you think science center executives should do to create good working relationships with their boards?

CEOs should understand that the board wants first and foremost to help advance the vision. Anything the CEO can do to keep communication channels open at all times will help make that happen. At the Sciencenter, we tour some part of the museum at each board meeting—a new exhibit, an area of the museum under construction, a program space—which helps ground the board in what is

really happening at the museum. Some refer to the CEO/board relationship as a dance, and I think it’s a good metaphor. We should always keep talking, thinking, and working together. We do that well at the Sciencenter. We have a great board, a talented staff, and an excellent relationship with our executive director.

### In what ways is the Sciencenter’s work meaningful to its community?

The Sciencenter has changed the lives of many young people in our community. We make ourselves accessible by providing free memberships to families with children eligible for free or reduced-price lunch. We offer free admission on the first Sunday of the month. We offer field trips to every second grade class in our county and the neighboring city of Cortland at no cost. We do all this because we believe that a rising tide lifts all boats, and we want to create a groundswell in our community that gets every child—regardless of means—involved with science as early as possible.

**Do you have a board member you’d like to see profiled in a future “Our Boards in Action” column? Please send their name, position, and contact information to [dimensions@astc.org](mailto:dimensions@astc.org) (subject line: Boards).**



Robin L. Davisson, chair of the Board of Trustees of the Sciencenter in Ithaca, New York

### Where do you see the Sciencenter headed in the future?

We’re starting new major programs for children at three developmental stages, which we call Early Explorers (birth to age 5), Young Scientists (ages 5 to 11), and Future Science Leaders (ages 11 to 14), all with the underlying theme of youth empowerment through science. We are excited about our future and the impact we can have on our community.