

Genome Technology Online



“ The SOLiD™ System provides me the throughput and accuracy needed to tackle experiments we hadn't imagined possible just a few years ago. ”

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A Mayor, A Maverick, and Microbes Galore

While the rest of the time zone was settling down to primetime television last night, the genetics community gathered here in Philadelphia was settling in for its own evening of entertainment. ASHG's evening symposium, organized by Aravinda Chakravarti from Hopkins, featured the big guns of genomics: Craig Venter, Richard Gibbs, Svante Paabo, and Jeff Gordon (of human microbiome fame).

Venter kicked off the session with a talk about his own genome. While it was vaguely disturbing how many people were running up to snap photos of him with their cameras and cell phones, Craig seemed unfazed by the scientists-turned-paparazzi. He spoke about the Venter Institute's new digs (a zero-carbon research facility is underway on the UCSD campus) and on comparisons between his genome and Watson's. The real challenge for the field, he said, was beyond sequencing a large number of human genomes -- "what we really need is complete phenotype information that is digitized."

Richard Gibbs' talk came 20 years after his first presentation to ASHG, he said, as a postdoc in 1988. He spoke about the skyrocketing amount of data being generated at genome centers, including projects like the third round of HapMap and ENCODE. Jeff Gordon amused the audience by reminding us that (as far as cell counts go) we're 90 percent microbial, 10 percent human. He also discussed results of a twin study that has shed some light on the gut microbiome. Svante Paabo spoke about the Neanderthal genome -- his team expects to reach 3 Gb of sequence data by the end of the year.

By far the funniest part of the evening came in the form of a visit from the mayor of Philadelphia, Michael Nutter, who greeted the community by saying, "I just wanted to reaffirm that I know virtually nothing about genetics," and went on to encourage attendees to shop and spend money while they're in town. (Fun fact: half of all conferences held here at the Pennsylvania Convention Center are about life sciences, he said.)

While GTO can't vouch for the shopping, we can attest that a good number of geneticists adjourned to the hotel bar after the session, where they no doubt did their part to stimulate the local economy.

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