Over the last 20 years, I have seen an increasing number of women joining the petrochemical industry which is a great thing. However, women still only make up 25 percent of the petrochemical workforce currently, so there is still room for growth.

Two years ago AFPM began talking about opportunities to bring women in the industry together with a focus on making connections and contacts, sharing information and knowledge, and finding support from others. We held the first ever 'Women in Petrochemicals' event at the International Petrochemical Conference (IPC), which was a huge success. Attendees asked that the reception be held at every future IPC.

AFPM was happy to oblige. This year, the 2016 IPC will include our third annual reception which will be sponsored by BASF. The buzz for bringing together women in the industry is growing, and will help continue to build and strengthen this event. I, like many attendees, can't wait to meet up Dallas.

In addition, we are focused on increasing opportunities for networking 365 days a year. We are continuing the conversation and networking online through our Women in Petrochemicals LinkedIn Group, which has 220 members and is growing. This group allows us to use social media to connect with women in the industry across the globe.

However, increasing diversity isn't just limited to encouraging more women to join the industry. In order to reach out to the broadest audience possible, AFPM has launched the Opportunity Advisory Council (OAC) as a platform for AFPM to engage with the communities we serve, as well as to expand relationships with women and minorities in the refining and petrochemical manufacturing industries. The Council was created to seek opportunities to increase participation of groups that are underrepresented at all levels of the energy workforce, to grow educational prospects for students in the communities we serve, and to discuss ways to increase the knowledge of the downstream sector.

We are working with a variety of community leaders, third party organizations, and member companies to engage these communities and expand relationships. Although the OAC is in its early stages, I believe this initiative will help our industry strengthen its outreach to underrepresented groups.

With the petrochemical industry growth, there is going to be a war for talent. We need to encourage the best and the brightest from all backgrounds to join us and be a part of a fantastic industry.

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