

Successful Women in Chemistry Series—Continued

Dr. Rebecca Ruck

By: Kelly George



Dr. Rebecca Ruck recalls her first Organic Chemistry research project during the NJ Governor's School of Sciences program as the initial seed that started her career in chemistry, and eventually her interest in Organic chemistry grew as an undergraduate at Princeton University. Fast forward to August 2014, where *Dr. Ruck*

was recognized as one of the ACS Organic Chemistry Division Young Investigator Awardees.

While an undergraduate at Princeton, *Becky* conducted research on *tert*-Butylcarbenes from non-nitrogenous precursors with Prof. Maitland Jones, Jr., her research advisor and author of her favorite chemistry text book. After graduating *summa cum laude*, *Becky* ventured to Harvard University for her PhD with Prof. Eric Jacobsen. In the Jacobsen labs, her research focused on the development of asymmetric hetero-ene reactions: discovery and mechanistic analysis of chromium(III)-catalyzed ene reactions of aldehydes and enol ethers, mechanistic comparison of hetero-ene and hetero-Diels-Alder reactions.

Dr. Ruck then traveled cross-country to Berkeley, CA as a NIH Postdoctoral Fellow in the labs of Prof. Robert G. Bergman, where she focused on developing new imidozirconium-mediated reactions: discovery and mechanistic analysis of dimethylzirconocene-promoted dehydration of primary amides, discovery of zirconium-catalyzed imine-yne metathesis reaction. *Dr. Ruck* was given the opportunity to return to her New Jersey roots, where she joined the Merck Process Chemistry Department. During her career at Merck, *Dr. Ruck* has obtained sever-

al patents and over a dozen publications in high impact journals. It is no surprise that *Dr. Ruck* has quickly risen through the ranks at Merck, where she now serves as a Director, DPC Site Lead-Kenilworth, NJ. When asked about why she loves her job, *Dr. Ruck* answered that it is, "the people I get to work with. The types of chemistry challenges that we are able to tackle and solve are just inspiring. I can easily talk to prospective hires about how cool it is to do this job because I believe it."

Dr. Ruck stresses the importance of many mentors in her career, both past and present. "In particular, I truly admire a previous manager, whom I also consider a mentor. He was secure enough in his own abilities to provide opportunities for me that could take me at least to his level. I try to support my own group members in the same way." *Dr. Ruck* commented that women in chemistry often face challenges due to "the limited number of role models available...It's always valuable to be able to tap into colleagues who have overcome the same challenges you are experiencing. Without those role models, it can be a bit like being stranded at sea. This is the reason why I try to mentor and support as many young female chemists as possible and encourage all other experienced folks to do so" says *Dr. Ruck*.

Dr. Ruck champions a work-hard, play-harder mantra. Outside of work, *Becky* plays competitive soccer alongside her team, "The Skulls," and loves to travel. "My current work profile photo is of me zip-lining in Costa Rica!" says *Ruck*. As for career advice, *Dr. Ruck* encourages other chemists to, "Follow the breadcrumbs. [These] opportunities, that on the surface may appear uncomfortable or challenging, can be some of the most fruitful and career-defining." *Becky* would sum up that outstanding chemists combine "Intuition and Insight with a dash of stubbornness!"