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Chemistry

Platform of the Swiss Academy of Sciences

Chemical Landmark 2013 – Designation of Lonza, a Pioneer of Chemistry in upper Valais

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The fifth «Chemical Landmark» in Switzerland was awarded to the upper Valais which has been one of the cradles of Swiss chemistry for over a century. The site of Lonza in Visp is among the oldest and more important industrial areas for chemistry in Switzerland.



The first site of Lonza in Gampel was built in 1897 (Copyright: Lonza AG)

The first important industrial site was put in service by Lonza in Gampel starting from 1897. The presence of a hydroelectric power plant by the river *Lonza* and the natural abundance of lime made the production of calcium carbide possible, which



The manufacture of calcium nitrate (fertilizer) (Copyright: Lonza AG)

was an important light source at that time. The range of products was then broadened owing to an important chemical industry in Visp and to intensive research efforts, even in difficult economic times. The site in Visp remains nowadays the largest production site of Lonza worldwide and is among the most important for R&D (approx. 2700 employees, featuring 300 persons in R&D). Hereby, for over a century, Lonza has been among the most important actors in the (economic) development of the upper Valais.

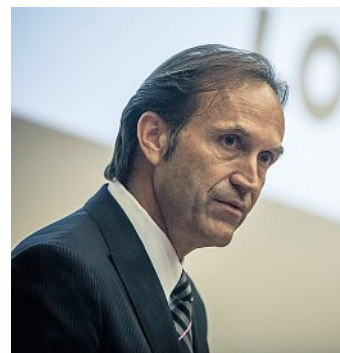
The award ceremony was held on 26 September 2013 in Visp with over 60 guests, including past and present Lonza collaborators and personalities from politics and the economy of Valais.

The ceremony was opened by Prof. Dr. Karl Gademann (President of the «Platform Chemistry» at SCNAT) who welcomed the audience and highlighted the importance of chemistry for Switzerland but also for the World market, followed by an introduction to the «Chemical Landmark» programme.

The historical background and the R&D activities of Lonza were then presented. The extent of the evolution of the area during the period 1897 to 2013 was captured in a short movie. Raoul Bayard (Site Manager Visp/Head Services EMEA) presented then a retrospective of the development of Lonza and showed how the company managed to continuously innovate for the past 115 years. He also demonstrated the importance of the apprenticeship system for the company (approx. 80% of employees started their career with an apprenticeship) and the strong link with the local



Prof. Dr. Karl Gademann (Copyright: Christian Pfammatter, Visp)



Raoul Bayard (Copyright: Christian Pfammatter, Visp)



Dr. Andreas Heyl (Copyright: Christian Pfammatter, Visp)



Iwan Bertholjotti (Copyright: Christian Pfammatter, Visp)



Prof. Dr. Paul J. Dyson (Copyright: Christian Pfammatter, Visp)

population (1 person out of 12 is employed by Lonza in the upper Valais). Dr. Andreas Heyl (Head of R&T and Regulatory Affairs) explained how Lonza managed to expand its portfolio by valorising by-products and developing new methods. The latest technologies used for the production of antibody drug conjugates in Visp were then highlighted by Iwan Bertholjotti (Global Head of Program Management Pharma Chemicals/Conjugates) who also explained the challenges associated with this treatment pathway.

Finally, the laudatio of Prof. Dr. Paul J. Dyson (Director of the Institute of Chemical Sciences and Engineering at EPFL) emphasized the importance of chemistry and chemical engineering, which have transformed everyday life.

“Chemistry is of course the subject that has, more than any other domain, transformed our lives. Chemistry has transformed the world we live in, chemistry has improved our quality of life, and Lonza has played its part in this process – a process that today knows no boundaries.”

Paul Dyson reminded the audience that not only medicines are linked to chemistry but also food supply, which depends on fertilizers and agrochemicals, plastics which are all around us, and *“other chemicals make the world a brighter and more colorful place to live, our clothes, our homes, almost everywhere we go we see the result of synthetic dyes and paints”*. *“We take the chemical industry for granted and rarely think what life would be like without it.”*

The historical importance of the company for the upper Valais and Switzerland was highlighted together with Lonza's efforts towards environmental-friendly processes.

“I am pleased to see that Lonza is committed not only to the region but also to key societal goals. To transform older processes into environmentally sustainable ones, to use renewable starting materials wherever possible, to ultimately ensure that the Valais, Switzerland and indeed our entire planet will function in a sustainable way in the future.”

This sets an interesting scene for the new EPFL Campus in Sion and will hopefully create a dynamic platform for sustainable chemistry and chemical engineering with strong connections with industry. The commemorative plate was then unveiled and affixed at the entrance of the site on *Lonzastrasse*, where everyone can easily visit it.



The Commemorative plate (Copyright: Christian Pfammatter, Visp)

Additional documents on the «Chemical Landmarks» may be found here:

www.chemicallandmarks.ch



Additional information about the «Platform Chemistry» and its activities may be found at www.chemistry.scnat.ch.

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Impressions of the ceremony (Copyright: Christian Pfammatter, Visp)