Pitt Gets $4.7 Million Grant to Reduce Hospital-acquired Infections

By Clare Collins

The University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine has received a four-year, $4.7 million grant from the Pennsylvania Department of Health to find new ways to stop deadly hospital-acquired infections that often are resistant to treatment. The grant, funded by Pennsylvania’s share of the national 2008-09 tobacco settlement, will focus on C. difficile, A. baumannii, and MRSA, which cause tens of thousands of deaths in the U.S. every year.

“Infections that are resistant to antibiotics are becoming increasingly problematic not only in the United States, but around the world,” said Lee Harrison, principal investigator of the grant and professor of medicine and epidemiology, University of Pittsburgh. “We not only need to develop new drugs, but also to improve infection surveillance and focus on targeted interventions.”

The grant will enable investigators to establish a Center of Excellence in Prevention and Control of Antibiotic-Resistant Bacterial Infections at Pitt, and it will include partnerships with several UPMC hospitals, Carnegie Mellon University, and Kane Regional Centers of Allegheny County.

The project will assess the medical and economic impacts of new strategies to prevent and control hospital-acquired infections, which were diagnosed in 27,000 patients in Pennsylvania in 2007. Patients with infections were hospitalized three times longer, and their admissions were four times as expensive as those of noninfected patients.

Most bacterial infections can be effectively controlled with existing antibiotic drugs, but microbial pathogens like C. difficile, A. baumannii, and MRSA have an inherent ability to develop drug resistance through many genetic mechanisms, making them particularly difficult to treat.

Pitt School of Medicine coinvestigators on the grant include Scott Curry, clinical assistant professor in the Division of Infectious Diseases; Jo-Anne Salangsang, a fellow in the Department of Infectious Diseases; Yohei Doi, an assistant professor of medicine; Bruce Lee, an assistant professor of medicine; and Paula Davis, assistant vice chancellor for diversity, schools of the health sciences.

The grant was awarded as part of the Commonwealth Universal Research Enhancement Program, which supports clinical, health services, and biomedical research, and was one of only four awarded to address the Pennsylvania 2008-09 Health Research Advisory Committee’s priorities.

Thomas E. Starzl Selected for Prestigious National Award

By Megan Grote Quatrini

University of Pittsburgh transplant pioneer Thomas E. Starzl, 82, whose work to pioneer modern organ transplantation spanned a half-century, has been selected by Castle Connolly Medical Ltd. to receive a Physician of the Year Award for Lifetime Achievement. The prestigious award is given to physicians who have made notable contributions to the field of medicine. Honorees are selected from more than 600,000 physicians currently practicing medicine in the United States. An award ceremony will be held in New York City on March 23.

Starzl is a Distinguished Service Professor of Surgery in the University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine and director emeritus of the Thomas E. Starzl Transplantation Institute at the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center (UPMC). He achieved international acclaim by laying the groundwork for the transplantation field of medicine. Today, the Thomas E. Starzl Transplantation Institute remains the world leader in transplantation experience with more than 10,000 patients treated to date.

“I am deeply honored to receive this award, not as an individual, but rather as a representative of the outstanding transplantation team,” said Starzl. “From the beginning, our team included all components of the University of Pittsburgh, from the schools of the health sciences to the consortium of affiliated UPMC hospitals. I’m proud to have been a part of this team, which has worked tirelessly to advance the field of organ transplantation and provide hope to countless patients who otherwise had none.”

Retired from clinical and surgical service since 1991, Starzl still remains active in research, mapping the relationship between donor and recipient cells and developing new therapeutic strategies to achieve immune tolerance after transplantation.

Castle Connolly Medical Ltd. is a national health care research and information company established in 1991 by a former medical college board chair and president. The company publishes the annual guide America’s Top Doctors.
Pitt’s University Club to Hold Open Houses for Faculty, Staff

The University of Pittsburgh’s University Club will offer Pitt faculty and staff a sneak peak of the club’s newly-renovated facilities through a series of open house tours. The time and dates of the tours, which will showcase the publicly accessible banquet and conference centers, as well as the members-only faculty and staff club are as follows:

• Wednesday, March 25, 9 a.m.-1 p.m.;
• Friday, March 27, noon-4 p.m.; and
• Monday, March 30, 3-6 p.m.

In addition to more than 10,000 square feet of conference and banquet space, the club will also offer such amenities as first-class dining rooms, a state-of-the-art fitness center, a College Room lounge, a library with wireless Internet, and special event space on the Rooftop Terrace, which provides a view of Oakland.

The University Club, located in a historic building at 123 University Place that was designed by Architect H. H. Richardson and opened originally as a private club in 1932. Acquired by Pitt in 2005, the club has undergone $20 million in renovations in preparation for its grand reopening April 1.

—Anthony M. Moore

GSPIA to Honor Gen. Roscoe Robinson Jr.

The University of Pittsburgh’s Graduate School of Public and International Affairs (GSPIA) will recognize the achievements of the late General Roscoe Robinson Jr. (1929-93), a Pitt alumnus and the first African American four-star general in the U.S. Army, with the dedication of a classroom in his honor and the inaugural Gen. Roscoe Robinson Jr. Lecture on Public Service and Diversity. The event, which will be held at 1-3:30 p.m. March 27 at 3800 Posvar Hall, is free and open to the public.

During the dedication, GSPIA Dean John T. S. Shaw, will comment on Robinson’s impact on diversity in public service and the U.S. military, as well as GSPIA’s efforts to advance diversity and awareness of diversity in public service. Immediately following the dedication of 3800 Posvar Hall, Major General Edward B. Atkinson, a West Point classmate and personal friend of Robinson’s, will deliver the inaugural lecture. Atkinson (U.S. Army, Retired) is a senior fellow at the Institute of Land Warfare, Association of the U.S. Army, and an AMRIN Magazine contributing editor. A brief question-and-answer session will follow Atkinson’s lecture.

Robinson graduated from the U.S. Military Academy at West Point in 1951 and thereafter earned the Bronze Star Medal for his service as a rifle company commander in the Korean War. He earned the Command and General Staff College at Fort Leavenworth, Kan., in 1963 and earned his MBA degree at Pitt in 1964.

—Amanda Leff

Pitt Dance Ensemble to Perform in “Disengaged”

The University of Pittsburgh Dance Ensemble will present “Disengaged”—a formal dance concert with choreography by students and professional guests featuring ballet, jazz, tap, and modern styles of dance—at 8:15 p.m. March 26, 27, and 28 in the Trees Hall Dance Studio.

This year’s guest choreographers include Michelle Hall Dawson, a former dancer with the Dance Alley Theater in Pittsburgh, and Gnee Reed-Jones, the education director for the Dance Alley Theater.

Dawson’s piece, titled “In the Station,” is set to Beethoven’s “Moonlight” Sonata and features seven of the ensemble’s dancers. According to Dawson, “In the Station” depicts “the passing of love and time and the eternity of waiting, knowing that personal loss and grief can arrive in some unexpected ways.” This work also was performed earlier this month at the American College Dance Festival at Pennsylvania State University.

In a strikingly different dance style, Reed-Jones’ piece for the ensemble, titled “Hot Locomotion,” showcases 18 ensemble members. The work celebrates the spirit of New Orleans and the strength of that community following the devastation of Hurricane Katrina. Pitt student choreographers for “Disengaged” include Lauren Bruno, who choreographed a ballet, Greg McCummings, who choreographed a hip-hop piece; and Christian Torron, Leah Dowley, Kali Gabriel, Liz Cedro, Lauren McaLaughlin, and Katrina Weaver, who choreographed modern dance works. Kristin Haughey’s tap dance, “Unified Discardance,” will feature 15 students dancing to the music of Janet Jackson.

General seating tickets for tickets for “Disengaged” are $5 for the public and $3 for students and may be purchased at the door. For more information, contact Susan Gillis-Kruman at 412-688-8622 or glk@pitt.edu.

—Patricia Lomando White

Cell Biologist Alan Hall to Launch Medical School Lecture Series

Alan Hall, chair of the Cell Biology Program in New York’s Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center, will be the first speaker in the 2007 Senior Vice Chancellor’s Laureate Lecture Series. The yearlong series in the University of Pittsburgh’s School of Medicine spotlights some of the top biomedical researchers in their fields. Hall will speak at noon on Thursday, March 26, in the University of Pittsburgh’s School of Medicine, 301 Oakland Avenue, Auditorium 8. The lecture is free and open to the public.

Hall’s lecture will deal with the family of proteins known as Rho GTPases that constitutes a primary focus of his research. By exploring how these proteins regulate cell migration and tissue organization and the biochemical pathways through which they act, Hall’s work has significantly advanced the understanding of the metastatic process by which cancer cells migrate throughout the body.

Before joining Memorial Sloan-Kettering, where he holds an Alfred P. Sloan Chair, Hall served in the Institute for Cancer Research and in University College in London. He earned his doctorate in chemistry at Harvard University and is a graduate of the University of Oxford. He is a fellow of the U.K. Royal Society.

Arthur S. Levine is the senior vice chancellor for the health sciences and dean of the School of Medicine at Pitt.

—Kristin Beaver

Pitt Tests Vaccine to Prevent Colon Cancer

Continued from page 1

About a dozen people have received the experimental vaccine so far, and the researchers intend to enroll another 50 or so in the study.

The vaccine is highly effective, so they would be expected to generate a stronger immune response. That may be able to stop precancerous lesions from transforming into malignant tumors.

About a dozen people have received the experimental vaccine so far, and the researchers intend to enroll another 50 or so in the study. Participants must be between 60 and 70 years old and have a history of developing adenomas that are deemed advanced, meaning they are greater than or equal to 1 centimeter in size, are typified as villous or tubulovillous, or contain severely dysplastic, or abnormal, cells. After an initial dose of vaccine, the participants will get shots again two and 10 weeks later. Blood samples will be drawn to measure immune response at those time points as well as 12 weeks, 28 weeks, and one year later.

People who develop advanced adenomas undergo regular surveillance with colonoscopy so that recurrent polyps, which are common, can be removed before matters get worse, Schoen said.

“Immunotherapy might be a good alternative to colonscopy because it is noninvasive and nontoxic,” he noted. “And, it could provide long-term protection.”

Colorectal cancer is the third leading cause of cancer death in the United States. In 2008, the American Cancer Society estimated that there were more than 109,000 new cases of colorectal cancer, nearly 41,000 cases of rectal cancer, and almost 50,000 deaths owing to both diseases.

Pitt’s colorectal cancer vaccine is sponsored by the National Cancer Institute and The Nathan S. Areenson Fund for Pancreatic Cancer Research. Its adjutant component, which enhances the immune system’s ability to respond to the target protein, was developed and provided by Washington, D.C.-based Oncovir, Inc.
German-born Angela Gronenborn loves to walk. For her, walking is a way to stimulate her thinking and stay fit. As a graduate student at the University of Cologne, she walked the city. As a postdoctoral fellow and scientist in London, she walked to her research lab in Mill Hill. She enjoyed hiking the Alps and exploring Munich in her time at the Max Planck Institute. And she combined Metro rides with urban strolls during her years as chief of structural biology at the National Institutes of Health (NIH) near Washington, D.C.

As a leading structural biologist and expert in nuclear magnetic resonance (NMR) spectroscopy, Gronenborn has a lot to think about. In her work, she uses massive magnets to decipher the structure of proteins and other biomolecules at the atomic level. Today, Gronenborn is the UPMC Rosalind Franklin Professor and Chair in the Pitt School of Medicine’s Department of Structural Biology.

“If you want to know how proteins interact with one another, you need to know their shapes and the location of their binding sites,” she says. This knowledge aids in understanding cellular processes and suggests structure-based avenues for drug development and treatment approaches. While at NIH, Gronenborn detected a way to inhibit the AIDS virus. Using magnetic fields, she unmasked the structure of a particular protein that binds to certain sugars on the virus, blocking the virus from infecting human cells. This led to a new strategy for inactivating HIV. Her group also pioneered three- and four-dimensional NMR methods that reveal enormous structural detail. Gronenborn—who was elected a member of the elite National Academy of Sciences in 2007 and a fellow of the prestigious American Association for the Advancement of Science in 2003—continues to decipher proteins, looking for other potential pathways to prevent and treat diseases.

Wherever she goes, she pursues life with European flair. Research, she says, requires as many adventurous minds as possible.

Professor Yuan Chang lives in a hilly, wooded section of Pittsburgh, not far from campus. Although the surroundings are urban, her family’s yard gets visits from deer, raccoons, and even wild turkeys. She shares this setting with her scientist husband, Patrick Moore, and the two “collaborate” to bring up their son, Jackson. They also work together in a University lab, looking for viruses that cause cancers. “To develop effective therapies and to gain a basic understanding of cancer, we need to know why some viruses evolve to cause cancers while others cause nothing worse than the common cold,” says Chang, a neuropathologist.

Many scientists have searched for such links, with few outright successes. Only seven viruses are known to cause human cancers—and two of them were found by Chang and Moore, who is a Pitt professor of microbiology and molecular genetics. In 2003, they shared the prestigious Charles S. Mott Prize for pegging KSHV, a herpes virus, as the cause of Kaposi’s sarcoma, the leading AIDS malignancy. In 2008, the Chang-Moore lab discovered that Merkel cell polyomavirus causes an aggressive skin cancer.

Chang is one of only a few scientists, and the lone woman, to have such phenomenal success in the virus-cancer field. One reason is that she and Moore developed a technique called digital transcript subtraction (DTS), which allows them to cross-compare tumor versus healthy gene sequences in the national Human Genome Project database. With DTS, they can quickly eliminate healthy genetic strands from errant strands. On very good days, they may even be able to match an errant strand with a known virus strand, a telltale breakthrough.

Chang serves on editorial boards and has received numerous awards, including the Meyenburg Foundation Award for Cancer Research, the Robert Koch Prize, and the New York Academy of Sciences’ Mayor’s Award for Excellence in Science and Technology. Although Chang is passionate about searching for the links between viruses and cancers, she also loves the broader wonders in her life—home, garden, family, and a yard full of wildlife.

Although Chang is passion for science, she is also passionate for public service careers. Ott was one of the first members of Pitt’s chapter of Facilitating Opportunities for Refugee Growth and Empowerment, a national refugee advocacy organization. Through the group, Ott—a triple major in chemistry, history, and French—also has spent summers working at a refugee camp in Zambia. As a postdoctoral fellow and scientist in London, she walked to her research lab in Mill Hill. She enjoyed hiking the Alps and exploring Munich in her time at the Max Planck Institute. And she combined Metro rides with urban strolls during her years as chief of structural biology at the National Institutes of Health (NIH) near Washington, D.C.

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Pitt Honors 283 Scholar-Athletes

25 Panthers earned Perfect 4.0 GPA Awards

The Pitt Alumni Association honored 283 student-athletes who earned grade-point averages (GPAs) of 3.0 or higher during the Spring 2008 and Fall 2009 semesters. The athletes were recognized at the Alumni Association’s annual University of Pittsburgh Scholar-Athlete Awards Breakfast on March 4 in Alumni Hall.

The women’s volleyball team received the Top Women’s Team Award and the Overall Top GPA Award for the third consecutive year. Four team members—Megan Dooley, Lauren Hartman, Jessica Moses, and Stephanie Ross—were among the 25 scholar-athletes honored during the breakfast for perfect 4.0 GPAs. An additional eight team members received Gold Awards for GPAs ranging from 3.5 to 3.9.

The men’s swimming and diving team was honored as the Top Men’s Team. Two team members, Jon Buchan and William Conklyn, earned perfect 4.0 GPAs and an additional five team members earned Gold Awards.

The men’s basketball team was named the Most Improved GPA Team.

A list of the award winners follows.

PERFECT 4.0 GPA AWARDS
Men’s Soccer
Justin Boehm and Andrew Kalas

Women’s Track and Field
Rachel Botham, Alexandra Briggs, Mycaiah Clemens, Kari Hedderick, Heather Lezanic, Victoria Toso, and Anna Yoney

Football
Lucas Briggs, Aaron Hassett, and Scott McKillop

Men’s Swimming and Diving
Jonathan Buchanan and William Conklyn

Cheer and Dance
Crissy Calolillo and Lauren Zammerilla

Baseball
Philip Koniecny

Women’s Swimming and Diving
Sarah Looney and Erin Medean

Men’s Track and Field
Zachary Mueller

Softball
Kayla Zinger

GOLD AWARDS (3.5-3.99 GPA)

Baseball
Raymond Black, Brian Chrisman, Sean Conley, Christopher Harner, David Kaye, Philip Koniecny, and Nicholas Mullins

Football
Ryan Tiesi

Women’s Basketball
Kate Popovec and Sylvie Tafen

Cheer and Dance Team
Beth Abbott, Megan Barna, Christie Boldiek, Christie Bonk, Tracy Clinton, Chrisry Calolillo, Casey Cradden, Sara Fabanich, Cathryn Hoel, Lauren Hunt, Brittany Jackson, Katelynn Jackson, Nicole Jackson, Gina Klemz, Kyle Loftus, Lauren McCormick, Aimee Moore, Erica Nickels, Nick Passe, Maddie Rendulich, Kelly Scanlon, Samantha Schems, Brooke Clemons, Kristen Weir, Kayla Lounge, and Lauren Zammerilla

Football
Lucas Briggs, Myles Careagin, Patrick Costello, Mark Estermyer, Adam Gunn, Aaron Hassett, Andrew Janocko, Scott McKillop, John Pelusi, Scott Shrake, Kevan Smith, Tyler Tkach, Dustin Walters, and Caleb Wilson

Gymnastics
Anya Chayka, Alis Crop, Samantha DeBone, Andrea Konesky, Nicole Kujawski, Jennifer Liberato, Shannon McConnell, Krista Rubini, and Lisa Taylor

Men’s Soccer
Justin Boehm, Morgan Faust Jr., Andrew Kalas, Patrick Kerr, Zachary Mathews, and Marshall Stula

Women’s Soccer
A’Idah Clinton, Shannon Cody, Ashley Habbel, Morie Kephart, Brittany Pfaff, and Kylee Veverka

Softball
Alicia Broudy, Valerie Mihalik, Rebecca Stottlemeyer, and Kayla Zinger

Men’s Swimming and Diving
Jonathan Buchanan, William Conklyn, Charles Hauser, Stephen Jackson, Patrick Mansfield, Jared Martin, and Geoffrey Morgan

Women’s Swimming and Diving
Hanna Bratton, Allison Horvath, Tamara Lelli, Sarah Looney, Erin Meehan, Cookie McIntyre, Kristen McMullan, Beth Newell, Kelly O’Hara, Erika Rodriguez, Megan Scullery, Megan Sisko, and Sara Sullivan

Men’s Track and Field/Cross Country
Anthony Casciano, Johnny Dogun, William Grinstead, Curtis Larimer, Zachary Mueller, Matthew Raquet, and Samson Weiser

Women’s Track and Field/Cross Country
Jameille Adams, Patricia Anyanwu, Monica Bhattacharjee, Nicole Bielick, Rachel Botham, Alexandra Briggs, Elizabeth Calabrese, Mycaiah Clemens, Caitlin Cocilova, Kaitlyn Flynn, Prachi Gupta, Kari Hedderick, Kristin Johnson, Lindsay Kramer, Heather Lezanic, Alicja Lichvar, Carrie Marvris, Aurieilie McCunley, Virginia Thistle, Victoria Tozo, Leah Ulizio, and Alexis Wilder

Women’s Tennis
Adela Aapro, Kristy Borz, Anna Broverman, Marie Eames-Fennelly, Minh Evans, Fran Liebenguth, and Sabrina Viam

Volleyball
Kelly Campbell, Meagan Dooley, Melissa Ferguson, Lauren Hartman, Allyson Hodnik, Rachel Kalberer, Monica Macelari, Jessica Moses, Tara Raebel, Stephanie Ross, Nicole Taurence, and Amy Town

Wrestling
Joseph Ciampoli, Matthew Darnell, Christian Fagan, Mark Generalovich, Ethan Headlee, David Kapetanovich Jr., Nicholas Oriio, Jacob Pelletier, Zachary Sheaffer, and Ryan Tomei

BLUE AWARDS (3.0-3.49 GPA)

Baseball
Ricky Bremeyer, Zachary Duggan, Ryan Furey, Hugh Henry, Joseph Leonard, Matthew Litzinger, Daniel Pfister, Nathan Reed, John Schulz, Joshua Smith, Brian Trymbiski, and Michael Wood

Men’s Basketball
Gilbert Brown Jr., Ashton Gibbs, and Bradley Wanamaker

Women’s Basketball
Chelsea Coile, Kalyrie Lim, Selena Nwude, Sarah Ogoke, and Shayla Scott

Cheer and Dance Team
Joe Bickel, Megan Cunningham, Michael Degenhart, Amanda Eggert, Tiffany Golonka, Thomas Gresko, Caylen Harris, Erin Kenny,
Erin Lageman, Alyssa Miller, Kayla Missigman, Michael Nuzzo, Teresa Pipak, Ashley Rader, Caitlin Timoney, Amanda Tomich, and Megan Worbs

Football
John Bachman, Patrick Bostick, Christopher Bova, Steven Dell, Justin Hargrove, Kevin Harper, Sharrif Harris, Robert Houser, Henry Hynoski Jr., Brian Kaiser, Frank Kochin, Zachary Latimore, Conor Lee, LeSean McCoy, Marco Pecora, Austin Ransom, Cody Sawhill, Justin Virbistsky, and Spencer Whipple

Gymnastics
Mallory Brewer, Danielle Bryan, Jessica Catalano, Kaitlin Harrison, Victoria McGugan-Carl, Molly Moyer, Alicea Talucci, Sarah Thompson, and Shannon Vafiadou

Men’s Soccer

Women’s Soccer
Laura Berbert, Elizabeth Carroll, Kathleen Caslin, Maura Caslin, Allison Finch, Janean Gardner, Molly Griganavicu, Molly McGeehin, Kaitlyn Kasuta, Christina Nicassio, Renee Pilch, Samantha Regney, Katelyn Ruhe, Rachel Vecchio, and Katherine Weiler

Softball
Ashley Amistade, Cory Berlinger, Nicole Cognigni, Clera Damon, Mollie Ellenberger, Kelly Murphy, Alyssa O’Connell, and Kaitlyn Schuster

Men’s Swimming and Diving
Eric Becker, Christoph Berger, Andrej Dubiel, Jason Erdeljac, Collin Forner, Rousseau Kuever, George Krakowski, Andrew Kyrejko, Zane McLain, David Mcclean, Jeremy Stultz, Aleksandr Volkovetski, and Charles Zettel

Women’s Swimming and Diving
Sophie Cross, Caitlin Harrington, Sabrina Jennings, Ryan Kishbaugh, Agnes Mago, Tiffany Malatesta, Danielle Scott, Ruth Seifert, Elena Spak, Morgan Speece, and Brittany Stevens

Women’s Tennis
Elizabeth Adams, Shannon Benic, Leah Friedman, Stephanie Scheinoff, and Carlie Smith

Volleyball
Melissa Stadelman

HOMER S. BROWN LAW ASSOCIATION
The Homer S. Brown Law Association honored Chancellor Mark A. Nordenberg with the 2009 Spirit Award during a Feb. 25 dinner at the Rivers Club, Downtown. Presenting the glass award is Nicole King (A&S ’02, LAW ’05), association president and a staff attorney and assistant corporate secretary for EQT Corporation. The Homer S. Brown Law Association, an affiliate of the National Bar Association, is a professional organization with 200 African American attorneys and jurists.

BIG IDEAS ON MICROFINANCE
Jonathan Morduch was the keynote speaker for a Feb. 13 Microfinance and the Law conference in the Barco Law Building that was sponsored by Pitt’s School of Law, Journal of Law and Commerce, and Law and Entrepreneurship Program. Morduch is a professor of public policy and economics in New York University’s (NYU) Robert F. Wagner Graduate School of Public Service. He also is managing director of the Financial Access Initiative, a consortium of researchers at NYU, Harvard University, Yale University, and Innovations for Poverty Action that focuses on expanding access to quality financial services for low-income individuals.

RORY COOPER SPORTS CARDS
A picture of Rory Cooper, director of the Human Engineering Research Laboratories—a partnership among the University of Pittsburgh, UPMC, and the VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System—featured on a special edition Cheerios box and “sports hero cards,” produced by General Mills. The box and cards are part of a national campaign organized by the U.S. Veterans Administration, VA Canteen Services, and General Mills to honor 12 gold medal winners of the 28th National Veterans Wheelchair Games. Cooper, who won four gold medals for swimming during those games, is the FISA/PVA Endowed Chair and a Distinguished Professor in the Department of Rehabilitation Science and Technology, Pitt’s School of Health and Rehabilitation Sciences. The special-edition Cheerios box and sports hero cards are sold exclusively in military markets and VA Canteen Services retail stores.
Awards & More

Two Pitt faculty members have been selected as 2009 Alfred P. Sloan Research Fellows. Brent Doiron, an assistant professor in the Department of Biological Sciences, and Anthony M. Moore, an assistant professor in the Department of Mathematics, and Codirecor of Pitt's Drug Discovery Institute. The honor will be awarded March 24 during the American Chemical Society's Spring 2009 National Meeting and Exposition in Salt Lake City. Wipf, who also is a professor of pharmaceutical studies at Pitt's School of Pharmacy, serves as director of Pitt's Center for Chemical Methodologies and Library Development as well as its Combinatorial Chemistry Center and codirecor of Pitt's Drug Discovery Institute. He has been a fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, the United Kingdom's Royal Society of Chemistry, and the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science.

Peter Brusilovsky, a professor in Pitt's School of Information Sciences, was recently nominated by the Association for Computing Machinery (ACM) as a senior member. The senior member grade recognizes those ACM members with at least 10 years of professional experience and five years of continuous professional membership, who have demonstrated performance that sets them apart from their peers. ACM is the largest international educational and scientific computing society for computing educators, researchers, and professionals.

Lynn Emanuel, University of Pittsburgh professor of English, poet, and author, has been named the 2009 Elliott Distinguished Poet-in-Residence at the University of Cincinnati. The position carries an award of $20,000. As poet-in-residence, Emanuel will teach an intensive five-week course for graduate students in Cincinnati's McMicken College of Arts and Sciences and will give a poetry reading and two public presentations. Supported by the George Elliott Fund and the University of Cincinnati Department of English and Comparative Literature, this position has been offered to one poet annually for more than 50 years. The Elliott poet-in-residence position has an illustrious history and includes such poets as Robert Frost, Randall Jarrell, and Robert Lowell.

Director of Pitt's Writing Program, Emanuel is the author of four collections of poetry: Hotel Piena (University of Georgia Press, 1984); (The Dig (University of Illinois Press, 1992), A National Poetry Series Award Book Club and Eric Matthieu King Award; and, forthcoming, Mob and Torch.

The University of Pittsburgh School of Law has been selected as one of two host winners for the Council on Legal Education Opportunity (CLEO) 2009 Summer Regional Institutes. This is the eighth time since 1993 that the CLEO Institute has been held at Pitt. Pitt's law faculty will challenge 40 CLEO Fellows with an intensive six-week law school curriculum as the students immerse themselves in the world of legal analysis.

University of Pittsburgh-Johnstown Advisory Board Member Richard K. Verma has been nominated by President Barack Obama to serve as assistant secretary for legislative affairs in the U.S. State Department. In his new role, Verma will work closely with Secretary of State Hillary Clinton.

“This is a most impressive accomplishment for Rich, who has been a true friend to Pitt-Johnstown and an exemplary member of our Advisory Board,” said Pitt-Johnstown President Jem Spectar.

A partner at the international law firm of Steptoe & Johnson L.L.P., Verma served for several years as senior national security advisor to Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid. In 2008, he was appointed by President Obama to serve on the U.S. Commission on the Prevention of Mass Destruction Proliferation and Terrorism. Verma is a veteran of the U.S. Air Force and a former country director for the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs. He also served as a member of the Obama-Biden Defense Transition Team.

Verma holds degrees from the Georgetown University Law Center, American University's Washington College of Law, and Lehigh University. He is a member of the Council on Foreign Relations and was formerly one of the council’s International Affairs Fellows. Verma also has served on the National Academy of Sciences’ Panel on Critical Infrastructure Protection and the Law.
Concerts


Exhibitions

Free at Last? Slavery in Pittsburgh in the 19th and 20th Centuries, Senator John Heinz History Center, through April 6.

Film


Lectures/Seminars/Readings


Pathogenesis, Treatment & Control of Tuberculosis—A Global Perspective and World Tuberculosis Day,” Alfred Lardizabal, a professor in medicine in the Division of Pulmonology at New Jersey Medical School, 6:30-8 p.m. March 24, Room G-23, Purnell Hall, Pitt Graduate School of Public Health, Public Health Grand Rounds, Pennsylvania/ MidAtlantic AIDS Education and Training Center, New Jersey Medical School Global Tuberculosis Institute, 412-624-1995, to register visit www.pamact.org/events.asp.


Jane Goodall, wildlife activist and conservationist, 8 p.m. March 25, Heinz Hall, 600 PPG Place, Downtown, Robert Morris University’s Pittsburgh Speakers Series, 412-392-4900, www.pittsburghspeakers.org.


Pitt PhD Dissertation Defenses

Jennifer Collinger, Swanson School of Engineering’s Department of Bioengineering, “Active Bions and Supraamphi-nauts Tender Changes Associated With Wheelchair Propulsion,” 7 p.m. March 25, Room 6014 Biomedical Science Tower 3.

Janet A. Cypkiel-Saffo, Graduate School of Arts and Sciences’ Department of Epidemiology, “An Evaluation of Psychosocial and Socio-demographic Factors Associated With Metabolic Syndrome and Cardiovascular Risk in Pheochromocytoma Syndrome Cases and Controls,” 1 p.m. March 25, Room 302 Music Building.

Daniel J. Grimmerman, School of Arts and Sciences’ Department of Music, “Pennsylvania Tune and Chorale Books in the Early Republic and the Musical Means of Cultural Assimilation,” 4 p.m. March 25, Room 302 Music Building.

Bonna (Pang-neng) Tang, School of Engineering’s Department of Bioengineering, “Miniaturized Tissue Engineering, Stem Cell Therapies, and Prosthesis Approaches,” 10 a.m. March 25, Room 501 Salk Hall.

Howie Lim, Graduate School of Public Health’s Department of Epidemiology, “Trajectories of Health Behaviors Among a Cohort of Middle-aged and Older Men in the Pitt Men’s Study,” 2 p.m. March 26, Swanson Conference Room, 3520 Fifth Ave.

Katherine M. Stone, School of Arts and Sciences’ Department of Chemistry, “DNA-Based Insights of Orthogonal Macrocycles by Electron Spin Resonance,” 10 a.m. March 26, Swanson Conference Room, 3520 Fifth Ave.

Maeve Eberhardt-Calder, School of Arts and Sciences’ Department of Linguistics, “Adequacy of Area Techniques of Regional African American English Idioms and Local Speech in Pittsburgh,” 10 a.m. March 27, 2081 Cathedral of Learning.


Fourth Annual Springboard 2009: A Mac athe Personal Research and Creativity, event encompassing undergraduate research fair, poster and mini-conferences, art exhibitions, and creative performances occurring across the University during April, 412-624-7674, www.pitt.edu/provost/undergrad_research.html.


Opera/Theater/Dance


Pitt-led researchers create quick fluorescent detector for TB, drug-resistant strains

A Healthy Glow

By Morgan Kelly

Researchers from the University of Pittsburgh and the Albert Einstein College of Medicine have developed an onsite method to quickly diagnose tuberculosis (TB) and expose the deadly drug-resistant strains of Mycobacterium tuberculosis that can mingle undetected with treatable strains. The researchers engineered bacteriophages—tiny viruses that attack bacteria—to inject TB bacteria with a glowing, fluorescent-green protein. They report their glowing, fluorescent-green diagnosis so the patient can be isolated and treated.

The group constructed bacteriophages specific to TB that have a green fluorescence protein (GFP) implanted in their genome. Bacteriophages spread by injecting their DNA into bacterial cells—in this case, the GFP gene accompanies the DNA into the TB cell, causing the cell to glow. A clinician can detect the GFP’s glow with equipment available at many clinics.

Besides quick diagnosis, the test also could be used to distinguish treatable TB strains from those that are drug resistant, a chore that can normally take months, Hatfull said. Hatfull and his colleagues treated M. tuberculosis with antibiotics at the same time the bacteriophages were introduced; the TB strains that were sensitive to antibiotics died, but the drug-resistant cells survived and continued to glow.

The group’s research was funded as part of a major new research initiative from Howard Hughes Medical Institute (HHMI). The institute announced March 19 that it will partner with South Africa’s University of KwaZulu-Natal to establish an international research center focused on the TB and HIV coepidemics in Africa called KwaZulu-Natal Research Institute for TB-HIV. Jacobs will direct research into developing rapid and effective TB tests, one of the new institute’s primary objectives. His work with Hatfull and Priuri was related to that effort. More information about the HHMI initiative is available on the institute’s Web site, at www.hhmi.org/news/krith20090319.html.

“The development of reporter fluorophages,” Jacobs said, “allows us to bypass the existing method of diagnosing TB, which requires cultivating slow-growing bacteria in a biosafety level-3 environment, a time-consuming and costly process. By infecting live M. tuberculosis cells with a fluorophore, a quick and highly sensitive visual reading can be done. We are optimistic that we can move the diagnostic process from several weeks to several days or even hours, which could have a significant impact on treatment.”
