Provost and Senior Vice Chancellor James V. Maher is Pitt’s Honors Convocation Speaker Feb. 26

James V. Maher, Pitt provost and senior vice chancellor, will be the keynote speaker at the University of Pittsburgh’s 34th annual Honors Convocation, to be held at 3 p.m. Feb. 26 in Carnegie Music Hall, 4400 Forbes Ave., Oakland.

The convocation recognizes undergraduates, graduate students, and professional students in academic achievement; student leadership; and faculty accomplishments.

Maher announced in November that he would leave his current position and return to the Pitt faculty at the beginning of the next academic year or as soon after that as his successor can be in place, is widely credited with helping to lead the University through a period of unparallelled progress. He has been Pitt’s chief academic officer since 1994.

“The work of Pitt faculty, staff, and students has been touched in a broad range of ways by the efforts of Provost Maher to help build a culture of achievement and impact. In a very real sense, then, he has contributed to many of the accomplishments we will recognize at our Honors Convocation, making him the ideal speaker for this special academic celebration.”

—Mark A. Nordenberg

James V. Maher, Provost and Senior Vice Chancellor, University of Pittsburgh

James V. Maher

Provost and Senior Vice Chancellor James V. Maher is Pitt’s Honors Convocation Speaker Feb. 26
Steven C. Beering (MED ’58, A&S ’55) remembers his life turning upside down when he was 15 years old and his family moved from Germany to Pittsburgh in July 1948. “The world was of different place,” he recalled during a recent interview. But the young Beering’s thirst for knowledge and success was unawakening. He quickly adapted to his new surroundings and began working to pursue his dream of becoming a doctor.

It was the influence of C. H. William Ruhe (MED ’40, A&S ’37), Beering’s mentor and a professor in Pitt’s School of Medicine from 1941 through 1960, that led Beering to the University of Pittsburgh. With Ruhe’s help, Beering gained entrance to Pitt after graduating from high school with highest honors. He was given a job in the University’s language departments, where he met his wife Jane (A&S ’55), who was studying Chinese. Beering taught French and German while pursuing his own education at Pitt, first as an undergraduate and then as a medical student. “I was a poor German while pursuing his own education,” he recalled during a recent interview. But the young Beering’s thirst for knowledge and success was unwavering. He quickly adapted to his new surroundings and began work to pursue his dream of becoming a doctor.

Beering specialized in internal medicine and endocrinology. After graduating from medical school, he joined the U.S. Air Force and began a career that included stints at Walter Reed Army Medical Center as well as at NASA during the earlier stages of the space program. Later, Beering accepted a teaching position with the Indiana University School of Medicine, Indianapolis, where he taught and maintained a practice for 10 years before being elected president of Purdue University. Beering served Purdue for 18 years, and during his tenure there, he established a successful scholarship program. He also established scholarship programs within the Indiana University School of Medicine and Pitt’s School of Medicine.

“I remember what it was like to work hard as a student, and I decided that when I had the chance, I would donate to support scholarships,” Beering said.

The Steven C. Beering, MD, Scholarship at Pitt’s School of Medicine is awarded annually to help a student reduce the cost of his or her medical school tuition. This year’s Beering Scholar, third-year medical student Veronica Ortiz, said she is excited to be working toward her lifelong goal of becoming a physician. Clinical rotations have been the highlight of her medical education thus far. “I’ve loved transitioning into patient care and being able to implement what I’ve learned in my first two years [of medical school],” she said.

Ortiz added that the Beering Scholarship has allowed her to pursue her academic and research endeavors with fewer financial burdens. Her research opportunities have included working with world-renowned neurosurgeons and critical-care doctors. “I am extremely grateful. Dr. and Mrs. Beering’s generosity has been instrumental in my medical school success,” she said.

Beering is an emeritus trustee at the University of Pittsburgh and chairman of the National Science Board, which is the governing board of the National Science Foundation as well as a policy advisor to the U.S. president and Congress. Beering understands the important connection between scholarship and success in the medical field. “There’s nothing quite so satisfying as to help someone attain his or her goals,” Beering said. “It takes years to get an MD, and graduating with debt can be a big setback, steering people away from general practice, family medicine, and care in rural and urban areas. Right now, there’s a shortage of physicians in each of these areas, but donating to support medical student scholarships [can ease those shortages],” he said.

The Beering Scholarship will continue to do just that, enhancing the education and lives of students like Veronica Ortiz for many decades to come.

Starzl, McGowan Institute, 8 Others From Pitt Honored by Carnegie Science Center

Organ transplant trailblazer Thomas E. Starzl, Distinguished Service Professor of Surgery in the University of Pittsburgh’s School of Medicine, has been selected to receive the 2010 Carnegie Science Chairman’s Award. In addition, the Pitt-UPMC McGowan Institute for Regenerative Medicine and five other Pitt faculty members and one doctoral student are recipients of the 2010 Carnegie Science Awards, given annually by the Carnegie Science Center to celebrate the accomplishments of individuals and organizations that work to improve lives through their commitment and contributions to science and technology in Western Pennsylvania. Two other Pitt faculty members won honorable mentions. The honorees were announced Jan. 28; they will be recognized in a formal celebration at Carnegie Music Hall on May 7.

Starzl, who is known as “the father of transplantation,” was selected by the Carnegie Science Awards committee for his role in pioneering and advancing transplantation science. Starzl joined Pitt’s School of Medicine in 1981 as a professor of surgery and led the team of surgeons who performed Pittsburgh’s first liver transplant. Thirty liver transplants were performed that year, launching the liver transplant program—the only one in the nation at the time.

Among Starzl’s many other honors are his receipt of the 2004 National Medal of Science from then-President George W. Bush, the 2009 Gustav O. Lienhard Award from the Institute of Medicine, the David M. Hume Memorial Award from the National Science Foundation, and the National Medal of Technology and Innovation from President Barack Obama in 2009.

Continued on page 6
A Passion to Serve, a Compass to Guide

Yvonne Cook is Highmark Foundation president and a key player in the Pittsburgh community

By Amanda Leff Ritchie

Yvonne Cook has maintained a single focus in both her career and personal interests: serving the greater Pittsburgh community and beyond.

In her professional life, Cook (CGS ’91) is president of the Highmark Foundation, a private corporate foundation that is funded by insurer Highmark, Inc., and has assets of about $100 million. She assumed the position in 2003 and is responsible for managing and directing the foundation’s daily activities. Cook also is vice president for community and health initiatives at Highmark.

Each year, Highmark awards millions of dollars to nonprofit organizations to provide community services aimed at helping people live longer, healthier lives. And Cook is in charge of selecting which projects receive foundation funding.

“I really like interacting with potential grantees when they come to me with their projects,” she says. “I love hearing their ideas. I like helping to shape and support ideas and seeing them come to realization.”

Some past grants that had the most meaning for Cook include $246,000 to support the Centers for Healthy Hearts and Souls, which provides residents of some of Pittsburgh’s neediest communities with access to organized wellness activities; $53,000 to support Magee-Women’s Hospital to expand its Girls on the Run program, a self-esteem-building and healthy lifestyles program; $185,000 to the Mt. Ararat Community Activity Center to expand a mentoring program to girls ages 12-14; and $200,000 to support the Mt. Ararat Community Activity Center to improve the treatment of maternal depression among low-income pregnant women or mothers enrolled in Allegheny County’s Healthy Choices Program.

Originally enrolled in psychology as a major at Pitt, it wasn’t until Cook met Lawrence Howard, former dean of the Graduate School of Public and International Affairs and emeritus professor of public and international affairs, that she realized she wanted to pursue a career in public management.

“Hereatly turned my life around professionally,” she says. “He truly helped me to think about the world in a different way.”

“I had a very positive academic experience,” Cook adds. “The University of Pittsburgh prepared me for a varied career. As I continue to move and grow professionally, I really can’t thank Pitt enough for that.”

Cook says her professors equipped her for life after graduation. “There’s a difference between learning in a class and actually being prepared for your future,” she says.

Cook also obtained a master’s degree from Carnegie Mellon’s H. John Heinz III School of Public Policy and Management.

Cook’s passions and interests outside of work can be found in the community, as well. One in particular — The August Wilson Center for African American Culture — is near to her heart. Cook is co-founder and treasurer of the center, which opened amid much fanfare in the fall of 2009. It took 15 years of hard work and determination to bring the vision for the center to fruition. “The center provides wonderful and high-quality African American programming, which is critical to diversity and inclusion efforts,” says Cook. “Our goal is to encourage everyone to participate in the center’s activities, and I am really proud of that.”

“Yvonne has been instrumental in helping us garner support from Highmark and other funding sources around the area,” says Oliver Byrd, senior vice president at BNY Mellon and chair of the August Wilson Center’s board.

“But most important is that she shows compassion for the artists and artist organizations—and a clear understanding of the contributions that people of color have made in Western Pennsylvania,” adds Byrd. “And it’s that kind of commitment that has enabled the center to make it so far on this 13-plus-year journey. It’s her perseverance that has helped to shape the vision of what the August Wilson Center has come to be.”

“Yvonne has valued our work, and we’re proud of that.”

Tireless in her efforts to affect change in Pittsburgh, Cook also is an advisory board member of Imani Christian Academy, a private school that works with at-risk children to transform them into spiritually, academically, physically, and socially whole adults, and a board member of the Multicultural Arts Initiative, which is a funding and advocacy organization that supports culturally diverse arts programming.

The awards and honors she has received reflect her successes. Among them are the Coretta Scott King Women of Diversity Award (Women-CONNECT Magazine, 2009); Women of Achievement Award (S.I.D.S. of Pennsylvania/Cribs for Kids, 2009); and the Florence Nightingale Award (Health Hope Network, 2006). In addition, she was selected as one of the New Pittsburgh Courier’s 50 Women of Excellence in 2008.

Cook says she is committed to helping level the playing field for African Americans and women, something she did full-time when she served as executive assistant to former Allegheny County Chief Executive James Roddey. In that role, she advised Roddey on health and human service matters and provided oversight to the county’s Department of Minority, Women, and Disadvantaged Business Enterprises.

Cook says her spiritual and family values—which she refers to as her “moral compass”—drive her desire and commitment to serve the community.

“My educational experiences, both in high school and college, continue to reinforce my need to be active in the community,” she says.

Cook says she takes pride in continuing to rely upon her moral compass as she moves up the corporate ladder.

“Sometimes, as you advance in your career, you become influenced—or you are seen to be in a privileged type of environment. I’ve been able to hold on to the compass that guides me and continues to help me make good decisions.”
HARRISBURG AND HOME


A WELCOME VICTORY

The Pitt men’s basketball team racked up a 63-53 victory against St. John’s on Jan. 28, bringing the Panthers’ season record to 16-4, 6-2 Big East. The Panthers clamped down defensively and made three free throws in the game at the Petersen Events Center. Above, No. 5 Gilbert Brown, a 6-foot-6 forward, shoots two for the Panthers.

MARY JANE BENT/CIDDE

MARY JANE BENT/CIDDE

E. Maxine Bruhns, director of Pitt’s Nationality Rooms and Intercultural Exchange Program, received the 2009 Special Lifetime Achievement Award from the Association of Fundraising Professionals (AFP), Western Pennsylvania Chapter. The National Philanthropy Day awards banquet was held in the Sheraton Station Square Hotel on Nov. 11. From left, Connie Schwartz-Bedo, past president of AFP Western Pennsylvania Chapter; Bruhns; and Jerry Mote, chapter president for 2010.

MARY JANE BENT/CIDDE

MARY JANE BENT/CIDDE

U.S. astronaut and physician Mae Jemison, who was the first African American woman to travel in space, was the featured speaker during a Jan. 19 evening in David Lawrence Hall, sponsored by the University of Pittsburgh’s Block Action Society. Jemison’s presentation, “Dr. King’s Legacy: A Call to Action,” was part of a series of free public events on Pitt’s Oakland campus Jan. 15-21 to honor the life and legacy of Martin Luther King Jr. Jemison entered Stanford University at the age of 16, earned her medical degree at Cornell University Medical College, and flew aboard the shuttle Endeavour in 1992.

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Schoen’s Research Raises Concern Over Frequency of Surveillance Colonoscopy

By Anita Srikameswaran

How often patients receive surveillance colonoscopy may need to be better aligned with their risks for colorectal cancer, according to two papers published by University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine researchers. The studies provide evidence that colonoscopy is both overused and underused in particular patient populations, raising serious implications for health care spending.

According to Robert E. Schoen, professor of medicine and epidemiology at the University of Pittsburgh and senior author of both papers, surveillance colonoscopy is performed to monitor patients who have had precancerous polyps, called adenomas, found on a previous colonoscopy. The aim of surveillance is to identify and remove recurrent growths before they advance to cancer.

“Guidelines recommend that patients who have had precancerous lesions, especially advanced precancerous lesions, get follow-up colonoscopy earlier and more often than patients who do not have polyps,” said Schoen. “Yet our studies show surveillance colonoscopy is not being used by the medical system in relation to underlying risk.”

The first study, published in the January issue of the journal Gastroenterology, demonstrates a substantial overuse of surveillance colonoscopy among low-risk patients and underuse among high-risk patients. The study followed 3,600 patients from the National Cancer Institute (NCI)-sponsored Prostate, Lung, Colorectal, and Ovarian (PLCO) cancer screening trial. Among 1,026 patients with no precancerous lesions at their initial examination, 58 percent underwent a follow-up exam an average of every 3.9 years, although the recommendation is to do so every five or 10 years. Detailed review of the records could not identify medical reasons for the premature testing. After five years, only 58 percent of patients with advanced precancerous lesions received surveillance colonoscopy despite the recommendation that they do so every three years.

“High-risk patients aren’t receiving timely follow-up colonoscopy, but there is overutilization among low-risk patients who are unlikely to develop colon cancer,” Schoen said. “This misuse wastes health care resources and risks developing cancers in high-risk patients that might have been preventable.”

The second study, published in the January issue of GIE: Gastrointestinal Endoscopy, emphasizes a persistent, ongoing risk of cancer, despite colonoscopy, especially among patients with a history of advanced precancerous lesions. For the study, 1,297 individuals who participated in the NCI’s Polyp Prevention Trial, a four-year study that examined the effect of a low-fat, high-fiber, high-fruit, and vegetable diet on precancerous polyp recurrence, were followed for an additional six years. Nine cases of colorectal cancer developed although the individuals had multiple colonoscopies during the 10-year observation period. Seven out of the nine subjects who developed cancer had a history of advanced precancerous lesions.

“Despite regular colonoscopy, colorectal cancer may still occur. This study emphasizes that patients with a history of advanced polyps are at particular risk and should be monitored closely with timely surveillance examinations,” Schoen said. “Combined, these studies seriously indicate how surveillance colonoscopy is being implemented, and represent a call to action to align colonoscopy use with patient risk, especially in an era where we are trying to spend our health care dollars as effectively as possible.”

Grandis, Argiris Receive Patent for New Head and Neck Cancer Treatment

By Courtney McCrimmon

Researchers from the University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine have been awarded a patent from the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office for the development of a new DNA therapy for head and neck cancers. The therapy targets the epidermal growth factor receptor (EGFR), a protein found on the surface of many types of cancer cells that causes them to multiply.

Standard treatments for head and neck cancers often are ineffective and tend to have debilitating side effects, explained Jennifer R. Grandis, a professor of otolaryngology and pharmacology at Pitt and director of the Head and Neck Program at the University of Pittsburgh Cancer Institute (UPCI). “We set out to develop an alternative approach that is safe and effective for these cancers,” she said.

The new treatment is based on a form of genetic therapy called “antisense,” or AS, injections in patients with advanced head and neck cancers who aren’t eligible for cisplatin, the chemotherapy often used to treat head and neck cancers.

Head and neck cancers are a group of biologically similar cancers originating from the upper aerodigestive tract, including the lip, mouth, nasal cavity, paranasal sinuses, pharynx, and larynx, that affect more than 45,000 individuals in the United States each year. Head and neck cancers are strongly associated with environmental and lifestyle risk factors, including tobacco smoking, alcohol consumption, and certain strains of the sexually transmitted human papilloma virus.
Kidney Foundation, the Brookdale Award in Medicine from the American Medical Association, the Rhodes Medal from the American Philosophical Society, and 24 honorary doctorates from universities worldwide.

Pitt’s Carnegie Science Award honorees follow.

Advanced Materials Award
Di Gao, an assistant professor and William Kepler Whitfield Faculty Fellow in the Department of Chemical and Petroleum Engineering, Swanson School of Engineering, University of Pittsburgh.

Gao developed the first anti-icing superhydrophobic coating that is able to prevent icing of freezing rain on a solid surface.

Corporate Innovation Award
McGowan Institute for Regenerative Medicine, an organization created by Pitt’s School of Medicine and UPMC Health System to tap into the vast potential of tissue engineering and other techniques to repair damaged or diseased tissues and organs.

The Science Center said in its release that “the McGowan Institute’s innovative structure has led to the development of therapies that are aligned with the regenerative medicine paradigm. McGowan faculty members have organized more than 20 clinical studies currently under way or that are anticipated to begin within a year.”

University/Post-Secondary Student Award
Bryan Brown, a Pitt bioengineering doctoral student. Brown has been recognized for his research, including fellowships from the National Institutes of Health and National Science Foundation, and awards from tissue engineering, regenerative medicine, and biomaterials societies. He is a graduate student in the lab of Steven Badvylak, deputy director of the McGowan Institute for Regenerative Medicine and a professor of surgery in Pitt’s School of Medicine.

Emerging Female Scientist Award
Charlene T. Chu, a professor of pathology in Pitt’s School of Medicine and the 2010 winner of the American Society for Investigative Pathology Outstanding Investigator Award.

Chu was chosen because of the seminal discoveries she has made that have placed her at the forefront of Parkinson’s disease research.

Honor Roll—Emerging Female Scientist Award
Kacey Marra, an assistant professor of surgery in Pitt’s School of Medicine.

As codirector of Pitt’s Adipose Stem Cell Center and a pioneer in her field, Marra focuses on regenerative medicine, particularly using fat-derived stem cells for tissue regeneration and the development of novel biomaterials.

Environmental Award
Devra Davis, founding director of the Center for Environmental Oncology at the University of Pittsburgh Cancer Institute and now a professor in the Department of Epidemiology in the University of Pittsburgh Graduate School of Public Health.

Davis was selected for creating both the Environmental Health Trust, an independent think tank devoted to studying and reducing environmental health hazards, and the world’s first Center for Environmental Oncology.

Life Sciences Award
Andrew Schwartz, a professor of neurobiology in Pitt’s School of Medicine, whose research has contributed to the development of brain-controlled prosthetic arms and hands.

Schwartz is a pioneer in the field of neural engineering and established Pitt’s Neural Engineering Program in 2004.

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**Happenings**

**Concerts**


**Exhibitions**


**Film**


“Unspeakable Vermin: Marcos Zapata, Anti-Healthcare Discourse, and Cold War Anxiety,” Vista Office, author, 3 p.m. Feb. 1, 602 Cathedral of Learning, Pitt Center for Latin American Studies, Humanities Center, jkl7@pitt.edu.

**Lectures/Seminars/Readings**


Pitt/PhD Dissertation Defenses

Amanda Mihals, School of Arts and Sciences, Department of Psychology, 11:30 a.m. Feb. 5, “Marry and Health Decision-Making: The Moderating Role of Social Support,” 4127 Northside-Fielding Hall.


“Fate, Fortune, and Risk Control: A New Interpretation of the High Rate of Cessation Settled in Tehran,” Shih-Hsiang Sung, graduate student, Pitt Department of Anthropology, noon Feb. 4, 4130 Poyear Hall, Asia Over Lunch Lecture Series, Pitt Asian Studies Center, 412-648-7370, asia@pitt.edu.


“Understanding, Formal Verification, and the Philosophy of Mathematic,” Jeremy Avigad, professor, Carnegie Mellon University’s Departments of Philosophy and Mathematical Sciences, 3:30 p.m. Feb. 5, 8178 Cathedral of Learning, Pitt Center for Philosophy of Science, 412-624-1052, pittcfs@pitt.edu.

**Miscellaneous**

Workshop, on Sandra Mitchell’s Unsinkable Truths: Science, Complexity, and Policy (2009, University of Chicago Press), 4:30 p.m. Feb. 3, 8178 Cathedral of Learning, Pitt Center for Philosophy of Science, 412-624-1052, pittcfs@pitt.edu.

**Opera/Theater/Dance**


**Behind the Lens, Pittsburgh Glass Center, February 5-28**

Workers on the Cathedral of Learning, by Harry W. Schowch, 1934: A New Deal for Artists, Frick Art & Historical Center, through April 25

The Exquisite Expedition of the Orchid, Exhibitions Daniel Bernard Roumain: Cheap Seats available at 412-624-4498, pittsburghsymphony.org, PITT ARTS


Happenings February 1, 2010 • University of Pittsburgh • 7
Switching to Low-tar Cigarettes Halves Chance Of Quitting Smoking, Pitt Study Finds

By Amy Dugas Rose

Smokers who switched to a low-tar, light, or mild brand of cigarettes had about a 50 percent lower chance of giving up smoking, according to a University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine study.

“Forty-three percent of smokers reported a desire to quit smoking as a reason for switching to lighter cigarettes. While these individuals were the most likely to make an attempt, ironically, they were the least likely to quit smoking,” said Hilary Tindle, lead author of the study and assistant professor of medicine in Pitt’s School of Medicine.

“It may be that smokers think that a lighter brand is better for their health and is therefore an acceptable alternative to giving up completely,” Tindle added.

The findings, reported in the November issue of Tobacco Control, are based on more than 31,000 smokers in the United States who participated in the Tobacco Use Supplement to the Current Population Survey, sponsored by the National Cancer Institute and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The survey is a key source of national and state data on smoking and other tobacco use in U.S. households.

Survey participants were asked in 2003 whether they had switched to a milder/low-tar brand of cigarette and their reasons for switching. They also were asked if they had attempted to give up smoking altogether during the previous 12 months and whether they currently identified themselves as nonsmokers. The total sample included more than 29,000 people who were current smokers and almost 2,000 who reported having given up the habit for at least 90 days prior to the survey.

In all, 12,000 people, or 38 percent, said they had switched to a lighter brand, with one in four citing flavor as the primary reason. Almost one in five of those surveyed said they had switched for a combination of better flavor, the desire to smoke a less harmful cigarette, and the intention to give up smoking completely.

Those smokers who switched brands were 58 percent more likely to have attempted to give up smoking between 2002 and 2003 than those who stuck with their brand. But this same group was actually 60 percent less likely to be successful in quitting smoking.

In the entire study group—including those who tried to quit and those who did not—the overall odds of giving up smoking were 46 percent lower among those who switched to a lighter cigarette for any reason than among those who stuck with their original brand.

Low-tar cigarettes deliver amounts of tar, nicotine, and other substances that are comparable with regular cigarettes, yet they comprise 84 percent of the cigarette market in the United States.

“Previous research has shown that smokers interpret the term ‘light’ to mean less toxic, an association that manufacturers have sought to exploit in advertising,” Tindle said.