



Scoop

July 25, 2003

THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS MEDICAL SCHOOL AT HOUSTON

Events to Know

July

28 Microbial Discovery Institute, a one-week workshop for high school teachers. Call 713-892-6915.

August

13 6:30 p.m., White Coat Ceremony for approximately 200 entering UT-H Medical School students, at the Hornberger.

15, 16 Annual Retreat, for entering students, Camp Allen.

UTMost Interest

The Austin House of Representatives is set to pass a resolution for **Jackson Griggs**, a fourth year medical student, to receive the Withers Memorial Award.

ARNETT ACCEPTS INTERNAL MEDICINE CHAIR REAPPOINTMENT

Dr. Frank Arnett has accepted reappointment as chair of the Department of Internal Medicine for an additional three year term commencing September 1, 2003. Said **Interim Dean Stanley Schultz**, "Dr. Arnett is an outstanding scientist, educator, and administrator. We are fortunate to have him among the academic leaders of this school."



Dr. Frank Arnett

Arnett is a world-renowned rheumatologist who was appointed interim chair of Internal Medicine in October of 2000, and selected to chair of the department in the spring of 2001.

In his chairman capacity, he also is chief of Internal Medicine at Memorial Hermann Hospital and physician-in-chief/Internal Medicine at Lyndon B. Johnson General Hospital.

Arnett's background includes directorship of the rheumatology division here since 1984. His clinical interests are in multisystem rheumatic and autoimmune diseases, including scleroderma.

ALFORD AWARDED ALPHA OMEGA ALPHA FELLOWSHIP

April Alford, MS II, was awarded The Alpha Omega Alpha Student Research Fellowship for her study, titled "Fas Regulation of Smooth Muscle Cell Apoptosis." **Dr. Yong-Jian Geng**, director, Center for Cardiovascular Biology and Atherosclerosis, is serving as her mentor. **Dr. Alan Friedman** and **Dr. Max Buja** nominated Alford.

In 1982, the Alpha Omega Alpha Society established five student research fellowship awards in order to encourage and support student research. The board now allocates up to \$175,000 annually for this project.

Alford examines atherosclerotic plaque formation in the ascending and descending aorta. "We use a mouse model to determine the role of the Fas/Fas Ligand receptor in vascular smooth muscle cell apoptosis, and we will measure vessel wall distensibility," said Alford.



Dr. Geng and April Alford

OUTSTANDING COMMUNITY SERVICE AWARDS GO TO EIGHT

The Office of Community and Educational Outreach awarded the first annual Outstanding Community Service Awards to second year MS student **Ryan Barrientos**, and third year MS students: **Jacqueline Chen**, **Jenny Giang Vu**, **Magdalena Peixoto**, **Manuel Reyes**, **Latricia Thompson**, **Janelle Williams**, and **Nima Yazdani-Baygi**. The awards were established to recognize students who show a commitment to the University's mission of addressing the health needs of the community at large through educational outreach and service. Award recipients were chosen both by UT-Houston schools and the Office of Community and Educational Outreach. Each student received a certificate and an autographed copy of *Conversations With a Medical School* by **Dr. Bryant Boutwell**.

OF NOTE - Dr. John Spudich, Center for Membrane Biology & Department of Biochemistry and Molecular Biology, UT-H Medical School at Houston,



was honored with the American Society for Photobiology (ASP) Research Award at the 31st Annual Meeting of the ASP in Baltimore July 6 for "major research contributions to the field of Photobiology." The award consists of a crystal plaque.

Spudich received the award and delivered a lecture on his research on microbial rhodopsins.

(See a related article, "Spudich is on track with new funding, facilities, and faculty," on back page).



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HEALTH SCIENCE CENTER AT HOUSTON
MEDICAL SCHOOL

Stanley Schultz, M.D., Interim Dean
Darla Brown, Director
e-mail: M.Darla.Brown@uth.tmc.edu
Colleen O'Brien, Editor
e-mail: Colleen.L.O'Brien@uth.tmc.edu
Phone: 713-500-5114; FAX: (713) 500-0597
E-Scoop online:
http://www.med.uth.tmc.edu/community_affairs/escoop.htm
Produced weekly by the Office of Community Affairs and Public Education



SPUDICH IS ON TRACK WITH NEW FUNDING, FACILITIES, AND FACULTY

John Spudich, Ph.D., Center for Membrane Biology & Department of Biochemistry and Molecular Biology, has been granted a MERIT award by the National Institute of General Medical Sciences (NIGMS) of the National Institutes of Health. These rare awards provide long-term grant support for scientists “whose research competence and productivity are distinctly superior and who are likely to continue to perform in an outstanding manner,” the NIGMS notes.

MERIT (Method to Extend Research in Time) status essentially gives Spudich a 10-year renewal to 2013 on his NIGMS grant “Structure/Function of Microbial Sensory Rhodopsins” by providing back-to-back five-year grants totaling about \$6 million.

“I am grateful for the recognition of our research program by the NIH,” said Spudich, a professor in the Departments of Biochemistry and Molecular Biology and Microbiology and Molecular Genetics. “It would not have been possible without the work especially of my co-worker **Elena Negri Spudich** (Senior Research Scientist at UT Medical School), and former and present students and postdoctoral fellows who have contributed outstanding research to our laboratory.”

Spudich’s research focuses on the structure and function of microbial rhodopsins, integral membrane photosensory receptors and light-driven ion transporters, which have become among the best characterized membrane proteins in terms of atomic structure and molecular mechanism.

The Medical School launched the Center for Membrane Biology (CMB) last August to focus research efforts on the challenging study of membrane processes. “One of the key frontiers of biomedical science in the post-genomic era is the crucial role of cell membranes in normal cell function and disease states,” Spudich said. “Ask virtually any investigator and you’ll find his or her research program bumps up against a membrane.”

“The first 10 months of the CMB have been a busy and exciting time. Thanks to **President James T. Willerson**, former **Medical School Dean L. Maximilian Buja**, Biochemistry Chair **Rodney Kellems**, and the Robert A. Welch Foundation, we expect to have the space and funds to bring in four new faculty members,” Spudich said.

- S. Merville

UT DOCS CLINICS, AT YOUR SERVICE

Looking for a doctor in your area? For a combined map of all UT Docs clinic locations in the Houston metropolitan area, check out http://www.utdocs.com/Offices/Maps/all_locations.htm.



Then click on the star closest to your area for a listing of physicians, their specialties, addresses, and phone numbers.



Susan Landry, Ph.D.

\$10M AID FOR CIRCLE

The Center for Improving the Readiness of Children for Learning and Education (CIRCLE), based at The University of Texas Medical School at Houston, will receive \$10 million over the next two years from the State of Texas in order to develop a plan for early childhood education, including developing resources for programs benefiting early education.

“We are very fortunate that CIRCLE was selected to play such a strong role in developing and evaluating quality rating systems for early childhood and models that effectively streamline funding sources for early childhood programs,” said **Susan Landry, Ph.D.**, director of CIRCLE. “Especially during these difficult financial times, this funding shows how much the state government values the education of our youngest citizens.”

The funding for CIRCLE was one of several education initiatives passed as Senate Bill 76, co-authored by state senators **Judith Zaffirini** (D-Laredo) and **Juan Hinojosa** (D-Mission). The legislation becomes effective **September 1**.

Last December, **Governor Rick Perry** designated CIRCLE as Texas’ state center for early childhood development. The center now works with the Office of the Governor and the Texas Education Agency to design plans to implement the governor’s Early Start Initiatives. As the designated state center, CIRCLE will work to develop training for early childhood providers in Texas, identify curriculum materials for voluntary state standards and focus on pre-literacy skills development. The center will also formulate school-readiness checklists for parents and further coordinate efforts among early childhood funds and programs.

- S. Rasp

GET READY FOR TEXAS’S TAX-FREE WEEKEND

Mark your calendar for **Aug. 1-3**. Clothing and shoe sales of up to \$100 per item are exempt from local and sales tax throughout the state of Texas. Here are some tips:

- ◆ Go through your child’s closet, or have older children go through their closet, and inventory what clothes still fit and what clothes need to be donated to a charity organization.
- ◆ Make a list of the basics that are needed to start the school year. Carry the list with you every time you shop and keep an eye out for good prices.
- ◆ Wait until the day **after** school starts to cash in big on back-to-school sales.
- ◆ Reduce impulse shopping by dividing shopping trips into two stages: scout first, then buy.
- ◆ Hang onto freebies throughout the year – promotional pens, pencils and calendars work just as well as the store-bought variety.
- ◆ Shop for clothes and other big-ticket items during the Texas Tax-Free Weekend, **Aug. 1-3**.