

## HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE BIOTECH CENTER

July 2008

### **Faculty Activities and Accomplishments**

Gerben Zylstra traveled to South Korea June 21-July 2 to participate in the Ph.D. defense of Ki Young Choi at Yonsei University, having served as co-advisor for Choi's thesis work. Choi spent the summer of 2005 working in Dr. Zylstra's laboratory, and they have completed eight joint publications in the last 4 years. In addition, Dr. Zylstra gave seminars at the Korea Polar Research Institute, Changwon National University, and Korea Maritime University.

Gerben Zylstra traveled to Indianapolis July 14 to 15 to participate in a focus group that was charged with developing educational standards for Agriculture, Food, and Natural Resource Biotechnology Curricula for high school and entry level college level education (grades 9 to 14). The focus group was constituted at the request of the National Council for Agricultural Education to develop nation-wide content standards to guide educators in creating curricula for grades 9 to 14.

Assistant Research Professor Rong Di participated in the Risk Analysis 101 workshop presented by USDA-APHIS-PPQ (Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, Plant Protection and Quarantine) July 7-15 in Raleigh, NC. The workshop was attended by 28 international and domestic participants, and instructed by 15 training specialists and experts from USDA-APHIS-PPQ. Dr. Di is developing a Biosecurity Certificate Program at SEBS/Rutgers at the request of USDA-APHIS-PPQ, and will be adding a new component on molecular diagnostics to the course.

Nilgun Tumer has agreed to serve on the Rutgers University Senate, representing the New Brunswick campus centers, bureaus, and institutes. Her two-year term started July 1. Also serving on the University Senate is Wendie Cohick, who is a representative for the Graduate School/New Brunswick. She is starting the third year of a three-year term. Faculty members Tom Leustek, Ilya Raskin, Lily Young, and Gerben Zylstra from the Biotech Center have previously served as Senators.

### **Student Activities and Accomplishments**

Congratulations to Karen Pesce, who successfully defended her Ph.D. thesis on July 18. Karen is a student in the Environmental Sciences Graduate Program, advised by Gerben Zylstra. Her committee members are Drs. Elisabetta Bini and Donna Fennell (Biochemistry and Microbiology), Lee Kerkhof (Marine and Coastal Sciences), and Peter Strom (Environmental Science). The title of her thesis is: "Molecular Analysis of Phenanthrene Degradation by Two Passaic River Isolates."

On July 9 the Biotech Center welcomed 12 students from the Monmouth County Biotechnology High School for a five week internship program. The high school students are working on research projects in the laboratories of Professors Bagnell, Haggblom, Lawton, Leustek, Tumer, Young, and Zylstra. Dr. Zylstra is coordinating the summer program and has been on the Advisory Board for the Biotech High School for the last 7 years.

Graduate student David Rotter presented a talk about his work on colonial bentgrass genetic linkage mapping on June 11 at the United States Golf Association bentgrass research meeting in Far Hills, NJ. David works in the lab of Faith Belanger.

Tiffany Polanco, a graduate student in Wendie Cohick's lab, presented her work at the Joint Scientific Meeting of the Research Society on Alcoholism and the International Society for Biomedical Research on Alcoholism held June 27-July 2 in Washington D.C. Her presentation was entitled "Alcohol exposure in utero leads to enhanced susceptibility to mammary tumorigenesis in rat offspring". Dipak Sarkar was co-author on the abstract.

The Cohick lab sponsored Vivian Periera, a rising senior from the InterAmerican University of Puerto Rico, this summer through the RISE (Research in Science and Engineering) undergraduate research program sponsored by Rutgers/UMDNJ.

Not previously reported, members of Gerben Zylstra's lab team attended the 108<sup>th</sup> American Society for Microbiology meeting in Boston June 1-5. Presenting posters were Research Associate Sinead Ni Chadhain, Postdoc Boris Wawrik, Graduate Assistants Ruyang Han and Hisako Masuda, and Research Assistant Hung-Kuang Chang.

#### **Grants and Fundraising Efforts**

Faith Belanger and collaborators James Simon (Plant Biology and Pathology, Rutgers), Nativ Dudai (ARO, Israel), and Nurit Katzir (ARO, Israel) were awarded a \$100,000 grant from BARD to investigate the feasibility of genetic linkage mapping of basil. The project gets underway in August.

#### **Conferences, Seminars, and Other Events**

Faith Belanger made an invited presentation on using DNA sequence data to identify Vanilla species at the Institute of Food Technologists meeting in New Orleans on June 29.

Wendie Cohick gave an invited talk July 10 in Indianapolis IN at the joint annual meeting of the American Animal Science Association/American Dairy Science Association. Her presentation was entitled "Lactation Biology for the 21st Century".