

Spring 2010



Howell Highlights

A Quarterly Publication by the Doris A. Howell Foundation for Women's Health Research

Research and Creativity

It is not often that historical research reveals facts that validate the mission of a group of inspired San Diegans who have been 'toiling in the vineyards' to fund and support undergraduate student research.

I am referring to an article that was published in the Wall Street Journal on February 20, 2010 written by Jonah Lehrer, author of "How We Decide" and "Proust Was a Neuroscientist", titled "Fleeting Youth, Fading Creativity". In this article he cites examples of famous scientists in history who were at their peak of creativity in their youth: Archimedes, 20, Galileo, 22, Isaac Newton, 23, Marie Curie, 30.

And in our era, the work of these scientists revolutionized the path of science: William L. Bragg, working on X-rays and crystal structure, still the youngest Nobel Laureate at age 25; Albert Einstein published several of his most important papers at age 26; Werner Heisenberg, pioneer of quantum mechanics, in his mid-20's; J Robert Oppenheimer, 23, director of the Manhattan Project and the Atom Bomb; James Watson worked intensely on the structure of DNA when he was only 25 years old.

The reason? Dean Simonton, psychologist at University of California, Davis, posits that young researchers have not become "encultured", weighted down by conventional wisdom. In other words, they can think outside of the box. Francis Collins Director of the National Institutes of Health (NIH), says that "they (young researchers) are not afraid to tackle the really hard problems". Of course, there are many other factors which contribute to the creativity and brilliance of these scientists. Simonton suggests that they are caused by some of the intrinsic features in the discipline themselves, citing physics as one. The only field that peaks before physics is poetry. In fact, there is an in-joke in the field of physics which states that if a physicist has not done Nobel-worthy work before getting married, he might as well quit.

Lehrer noted that in 1980 the largest share of NIH grants went to scientists in their late 30's but by 2006 the curve shifted sharply to the right when the highest proportion of grants went to scientists in their late 40's. He noted further that the NIH has responded to these data by increasing their recent grants from 25% to 30% to new researchers or first applicants. Still not a resounding recognition of the age of greatest creativity.

We are thankful to Dr. Howell for her intuition, vision, and resolve that our first priority should be to support younger undergraduate researchers in a program that has been on-going for the past ten years. Our success can be measured by the number of our successful applicants who, after graduation, have attained prestigious appointments in research agencies, pursued further education toward doctoral degrees in various disciplines, but, above all, have carried within themselves to their future careers that spark of intellectual curiosity and rigorous thinking which made them successful recipients of the Howell Scholarships.

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OUR MISSION

The mission of the Doris A. Howell Foundation for Women's Health Research is to fund undergraduate scientists in their relevant research and to educate women to be catalysts for better family health.

To make a donation, please call (858) 454-7797.

CONTACT US

7514 Girard Ave.

1 PMB 320

La Jolla, CA 92037

Phone: 858-454-7797

Fax: 858-454-7797

E-mail: admin@howellfoundation.org

Website: www.howellfoundation.org

New Howell Circle Members

Thank you to all new and renewing Howell Circle members. Your support encourages undergraduates to pursue independent research.

Gloria Baird
Gigi Cramer
Trude Hollander
Camilla Hutson
Alice Kirby
Lois Lewis
Karon Luce
Colleen Peterson
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Sharon Weremiuk

Although it takes all levels of giving to make our Foundation successful, those who contribute \$125 or more in a given year are extended membership in the Howell Circle.

You will have the satisfaction of knowing that your gift will make a positive impact on the health and well being of women, today and in the long-term.

Please use the enclosed envelope to join or renew your Howell Circle membership – or to make a tax-deductible gift in support of Howell Research Grants awarded to undergraduate students researching women's health issues.

Hope Ahead for Alzheimer's Disease?

By Ruth S. Jacobowitz

The first Howell Foundation Health Education Series Luncheon of 2010 was sold-out. We had the largest luncheon group ever. There is little doubt that the subject "Alzheimer's Disease: A 2010 Perspective" called to so many of us as we search for hope from this debilitating disease. The lecture presented by Edward Koo, M.D. Professor of Neurosciences at UCSD, was interesting, helpful and hopeful.

Alzheimer's Disease is a brain disorder named for the German physician Alois Alzheimer who first described it in 1906. Scientists have learned a great deal about it in the century since Dr. Alzheimer first drew attention to it. Yet, Alzheimer's Disease is still the most common age-related dementing illness currently affecting over four million individuals in the United States alone. Many of us in the audience had witnessed the disease's unrelenting progression up close and personally. Needless to say we hung onto Dr. Koo's discussion of the most current ideas about its causes, the current treatments available as well as the experimental treatments for this frightening disease.

Dr. Koo explained "that we do 'slip' as we grow older beginning around age 40 and that it often takes us longer to get to the right answers." He also noted that we have a physical decline as we age. However, he said Alzheimer's Disease is a progressive irreversible brain disorder that "gradually destroys memory and the ability to learn and reason." Sadly it is fatal after about eight to ten years following diagnosis.

Today there are a number of medications that may work to slow down the progression of the disease, so as I listened to the talk, I didn't know whether to be hopeful or depressed. Then, as he concluded, Dr. Koo told us that "There is much research going on presently by pharmaceutical companies including Pfizer as well as an Eli Lilly-Wyeth medication that is in Phase III trials at the FDA. If, he noted, "some really work we will have a treatment for Alzheimer's Disease." And he went on to say "I may have a much more hopeful talk in about 18 months." Stay tuned!



Dr. Edward Koo, Dr. Doris Howell and Pattie Wellborn, Board Chair

Just the Facts, Ma'am!

Information from the *2010 Alzheimer's Disease Facts and Figures Report* by the Alzheimer's Association. Find the report at www.alz.org/alzheimers_disease_facts_figures.asp

- Alzheimer's disease is the most common cause of dementia
- 5.3 million Americans now have Alzheimer's disease or other dementia.
- Alzheimer's disease was the sixth leading cause of death across all ages in the United States in 2006. It was the fifth-leading cause of death for those aged 65 and older.
- One in eight persons aged 65 and older have Alzheimer's disease.
- Every 70 seconds, someone in America develops Alzheimer's disease.
- Women are more likely than men to have Alzheimer's disease and other dementias, because they live long enough to develop these conditions and generally live longer than men.

♥ Thank you to contributing editors Beatrice K. Rose, M.D. and Ruth S. Jacobowitz.

A Conversation with Dr. Howell...

It is gratifying to know that historical research as reported by Jonah Lehrer (WSJ 02/20/20) indicates that some of the most important contributions to the field of science were made by scientists who were in their twenties, a very young age by any measure. These data strengthen our belief in the validity of our mission to fund and support undergraduate students in their research. In addition the high rate of successful completion of student research projects under rigorous monitoring by their faculty mentors and the post graduate successful progress of our scholars toward doctoral degrees in a variety of disciplines, many of our award recipients have been able to continue research as a career choice. The follow-up data of our awardees further encourages us to continue our program.

However, our past success may be endangered by the untoward and dismal current economic situation. In the past, students have told us that without the scholarship funding they would be unable to undertake any research work at all because of the necessity to work a second or third job to support themselves. Currently the situation has become even more dire. College tuition has risen inciting both students and faculty to protest publicly. There is more competition for even low-level jobs. And parents, who were once a reliable source of financial aid to some degree, are faced with their own problems of unemployment, reduced incomes, and inability to financially assist their children as before.

It is important for us to recognize that the future of this generation is in jeopardy. Despite the unpleasantness of the situation, we must not turn away from it. Everyone is feeling some financial constraint but we must, to the best of our ability, continue to support these young people on whom the future of our country depends. Not just the future of science and the well being of the citizens, the prestige and stature of our country is at stake. The Howell Foundation pledges its continued support of our mission and it is my hope that you will continue to be partners with us in this effort.



Doris A. Howell, M.D.

Full Scholarship Donor Honor Roll



Howell Scholar Wendy Fong, Scholarship Donor Cher Conner and Howell Scholar Chris Petro

It is with sincere thanks that we elect Howell Foundation Board and Howell Circle member, Cher Conner, to the Scholarship Donor Honor Roll for her generosity in funding the first full Scholarship for the Year 2010. During the past 14 years, the Howell Foundation has funded more than 160 undergraduate research projects. The funds awarded to the students give them an opportunity to work for a full academic year in a laboratory under the careful supervision of their professorial mentors while testing an individual hypothesis, one that has some relevance to women's health issues. Many of these students would be unable to undertake any research work at all because of the necessity to work for their school and living costs. In sponsoring a full Howell scholarship (\$3,000 for one year), you, the donor, have the unique opportunity to develop and enjoy a personal relationship with one of the Howell scholars and provide encouraging support. There are other benefits to supporting the scholarship, such as knowing that research in women's health issues is being actively studied. And who knows but that the research you fund today may benefit you or someone you know tomorrow!

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**The Doris A. Howell Foundation
for Women's Health Research Presents...**

A look forward to exciting new programs in 2010 on cutting edge science:

Thursday, April 29, 2010
"Advances in Gynecologic Technologies;
A Minimally Invasive Approach to Women"
David Harari, M.D., Sharp Healthcare

Thursday, August 5, 2010
"Stem Cell Biology --
A Key to Regenerative Medicine"
Evan Snyder, M.D., The Sanford - Burnham Institute

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**Doris A. Howell
Foundation for
Women's Health
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7514 Girard Avenue
1 PMB 320
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