MERRY CHRISTMAS

and a wonderful 2015

from the

Staff & Students,
Department of Biochemistry,
University of Otago

15th December 2014

Welcome to the December 2014 Biochemistry Letter to Alumni. This year's letter is particularly special for one of us (Kurt) because it will be his last as HOD. Next year you will be hearing from Professor Catherine Day who takes over the HOD position in February 2015. It has been Kurt's pleasure to serve as HOD and he hopes after stepping down to continue to hear from many of you who graduated during his term.

It has been a good year in the Department and several items compete for "Biggest News of 2014". Our staff received the following national honours (in chronological order): Peter Dearden won the Genetics Society of Australasia's Ross Crozier Medal for outstanding contributions to genetics; Parry Guilford won the Health Research Council's prestigious Beavan Medal, acknowledging his work in identifying the gene mutation responsible for causing hereditary diffuse gastric cancer in a large North Island whanau, and also his role in the development of a novel urine test for bladder cancer; Catherine Day was made a Fellow of the Royal Society of New Zealand; then, at the same function just a couple of weeks ago, it was announced that Peter Dearden and Parry Guilford had won the Royal Society's Callaghan Medal and Sir Charles Hercus Medal respectively. Peter's Callaghan Medal for "for the outreach activities of Genetics Otago that he helped form and his involvement in communicating his genetics research on honey bees with the beekeeping industry and the public" and Parry's Sir Charles Hercus Medal for the same work that won him the Beavan Medal.

One of our newer staff members, Monica Gerth, did very well indeed on a more local level, winning the 2014 University of Otago Health Sciences Translational Research Grant, a $300,000 Marsden Fast Start grant, and was runner up in Otago Innovation Ltd's 2014 Proof of Concept grant competition. She and Wayne Patrick also made the news in Bangladesh! A colleague sent a link to a newspaper article a Bangladeshi newspaper had translated from one in the NZ Herald.

This year we also did well in the Health Research Council Round scoring both project grants (Sally McCormick) and programme awards (Tony Merriman). These results are heartening given the very tough environment for science funding in New Zealand with success rates across the board of less than 10%!

Our students performed well in 2014 with Nicole Neverman, a PhD student in Stephanie Hughes's lab, being runner up in both the Otago School of Medical Sciences Postgraduate Symposium Speaking Award in March and the Otago Medical School Research Society's PhD Student Speaker Awards competition in September; Chris Harris (Cancer Genetics) and Monica Sharma (McCormick Lab) won first prize and runner up respectively in the Otago Medical School Research Society's 2014 Student Science Writing Competition. Another student, Max Wilkinson, an Honours student in Kurt's lab, won a Rutherford scholarship to Cambridge University, and Ashley Campell, also with Kurt, won a Fulbright Award to study in the States.

Tony Reeve retired this year after nearly forty years in the Department. Tony finished his PhD here in 1975, and after a post-doc at Johns Hopkins University he returned and joined Dick Wilkins in the Cancer Research Laboratory. After a brief stint at the Howard Hughes Medical Institute at Ann Arbor, Michigan in 1987-88 Tony returned to take up the position of Director of the Cancer Genetics lab. He was promoted to Professor in 1995, and has in addition held positions as a Director of the Otago Genomics Facility and Chair of the Scientific Advisory Board of Pacific Edge Biotechnology, a company he and Parry Guilford formed in 2001. We gave Tony a great send-off, with dinner at the Staff Club and speeches from Merv Smith, Warren Tate and key comments from George Petersen!

This year Stephanie Hughes initiated a new assessment tool for our fourth year students. Each one was assigned a weekly seminar to produce a written report on, and for which they were also to construct a "graphical abstract". Several of these were published on our website, and we invite you to visit the news page (biochem.otago.ac.nz/news/) to read these, and the many other news articles we do not have room for here.

Last week was the departmental Christmas party and this year we had a rock and roll band with one student member! Have a look on Facebook to see which staff member is our best dancer!

As always, we do hope you will keep in touch, and send us your own news on your careers and your life adventures.

Email your news to: biochemistry@otago.ac.nz or

Post your news to : The Secretary, Department of Biochemistry, PO Box 56, Dunedin 9054, New Zealand

and "Like" us at http://www.facebook.com/Biochemistry.Otago

Best wishes for Christmas and 2015,

Kurt Krause and Bronwyn Carlisle, on behalf of

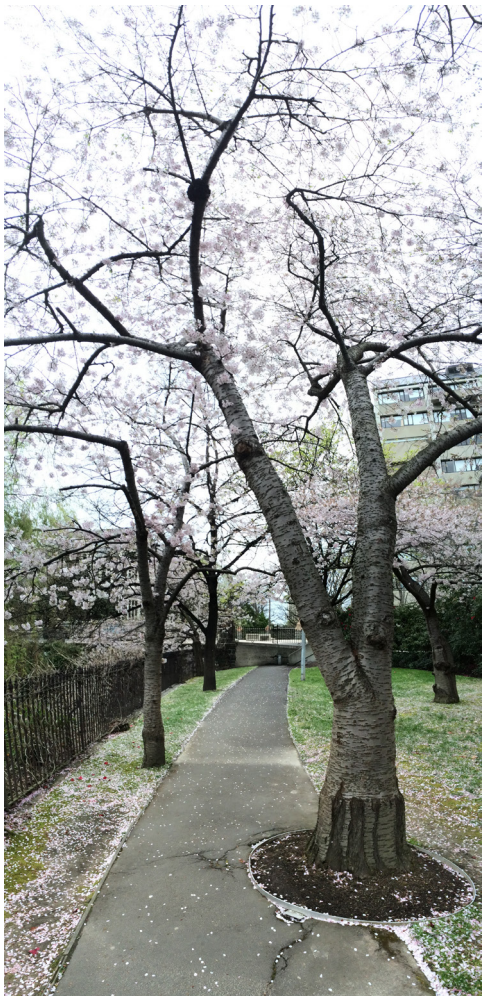
the Biochemistry staff and students

2014 Graduations

With the increase in "programme" degrees it is becoming difficult to separate out numbers of graduates whose education has been predominantly Biochemistry-based, we therefore present the total number of graduations with a significant Biochemistry component.

In 2014 there were 11 PhD, 2 BBiomedSci, 121 BSc, 26 BSc(Hons), and 4 MSc students graduating over the disciplines of Biochemistry, Genetics, and Plant Biotechnology.

The blossoms outside the Staff Club are still beautiful in Spring



The Otago Regional Council has been doing flood protection work just by the Department. Here you see during and after photos from opposite ends. We lost all the willows and several blossom trees, but we think it will be lovely when we are finally allowed in to use it

Tony Reeve's retirement dinner

The Royal Society asked us to take photos of previous Marsden Fund beneficiaries in funny places with their banner!

A talented undergraduate student made the teaching fellows a cake

The winners of the 2014 Brewing Competition shook hands …

… the loser had to drink his own brew:

This year's Christmas party was held in the Valentine Common Room at St Margaret's

We had a visit from Diana Hill, who came to attend a lunch in honour of George Petersen that was held as part of the 2014 International Science Festival.

Department Publications for 2014

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