

Season's Greetings



from the staff and students
of the
Department of Biochemistry
at the
University of Otago

19th December 2011

Hard to believe that it is December already. The tomorrows seem to have 'leapt' rather than "crept in this petty pace from day to day". But no matter, it has been an eventful year and now is a good time to look back at some of the key events in terms of our staff, students and department.

This year we welcomed Catherine Day and last year Iain Lamont to their roles as Professors of Biochemistry, almost doubling our Professorial staff. We also welcomed Wayne Patrick to our staff. He has joined us from Massey Albany with his wife and fellow researcher, Monica Gerth, and will be carrying out work on protein evolution and design, which is a great addition to our themes of research. Wayne brought with him a coveted Rutherford Discovery Fellowship to help in the development of his research programme. Wayne, along with Anita Dunbier, Lynette Brownfield and Liz Ledgerwood represent four recently appointed academic staff that position the department well for future growth.

In a related development, we learned last month that our own Peter Mace, has been awarded a Rutherford Discovery Fellowship that will allow him to return to the department in mid-year 2013. Peter was a doctoral student with John and Sue Cutfield and a postdoctoral fellow with Catherine Day during his time at Otago. He is now finishing a successful stint at The Burnham Institute in San Diego carrying out research on proteins that promote chemotherapy resistance in breast cancer. Upon his return, Peter will be setting up a research program studying the structural basis of cell signaling in human disease.

This year we have had two notable retirements that deserve special mention. Sue Cutfield is stepping down as a Senior Research Fellow after spending 31 years at Otago. Sue brought enormous scientific talent and knowledge to her work on protein structure and function. Sue and her husband John Cutfield formed a formidable team and together they established protein crystallography in the South Island. Sue's scientific lineage is remarkable as she was the last graduate student of one of the world's most talented crystallographers, Nobel Laureate Dorothy Hodgkin. Sue's stint with Dorothy, in a group that had a notably Kiwi flavour, including Guy Dodson, Ted and Heather Baker, as well as her husband John, occurred just as the field was forming, and ensured that New Zealand was a party to all the amazing developments that occurred in structural biology since its inception. We will miss Sue greatly, but expect to call on her often for her expertise in protein crystal growth and structure solution.

Just next door to the Cutfield lab, is housed Warren Tate's group, which includes his long-time friend and collaborator Liz Poole. Liz has also announced that she is retiring from her position as a Senior Research Fellow at the end of this year. Liz has been with the department for 20 years apart from a brief sojourn in the Deputy Vice-Chancellors office. Liz was involved in several key projects in the group, most recently studies on PEG10, the first human protein found to undergo frameshifting. She and Warren together mentored many outstanding students, helping them tackle their honours and postgraduate degrees, leaving quite a legacy of talented scientific progeny.

Students throughout our department had an encouraging year in 2012. Our enrollments were up in second and third year, while holding steady in first year. We have graduated 34 students with a Bachelors or a Bachelors with honours degree this year. In terms of post graduates we have had 3 students complete their Masters and 12 their PhDs in 2012.

We had some notable grant successes this year, with Fast Start Marsdens to Lynette Brownfield and Anita Dunbier and a Standard Marsden to Richard MacKnight. In the Health Research Council round, three of our staff, Stephanie Hughes, Tony Merriman and Mik Black were named co-investigators on successful grants and all are receiving support from these budgets. Sally McCormick received a Heart Foundation Grant, and Liz Ledgerwood and Sigurd Wilbanks received Lottery Health Grants. Several of our staff received local and Otago based support. In these tough economic times, we have done quite well.

In February Warren Tate was awarded the Otago School of Medical Sciences prize for Excellence in Postgraduate Supervision. This prize is awarded based on student nominations, and really just confirms what we already knew.

Parry Guilford and Catherine Day joined other scientists from Otago and Auckland in a joint presentation to Parliament in August, highlighting the cancer research undertaken in New Zealand.

Last year we began what we hoped would become an annual event; the Three Minute Thesis competition. This year Thermo Fisher were kind enough to provide sponsorship, and the 2012 winner was Jared Fudge from the Macknight Lab with "Can odd SOCS regulate *Medicago* flowering?"; second was Tim Crawford from the Eaton-Rye Lab with "Clean energy for a green future"; and Nicole Neverman from the Hughes Lab came third with "Preventing a traffic jam!".

Most of you will remember Murray Cockerill, our wonderful electronics technician who can fix anything you throw at him. This year Murray was honoured by the Dunedin North Rotary Club with a "Pride in Workmanship" Award. Murray has been working in the Department of Biochemistry since 1977, and we are hanging on to him as hard as we can.

On the sport/fitness front, Professional Practice Fellow Kaye Wilson and PA to HOD Teena Joyce won medals in the 2012 Master's Games Tournament held here in Dunedin. Teena's team won the silver medal in Women's Football 25+. Kaye won golds in both Bridge and Twilight 400 (curling, darts, 10 pin bowling, and small bore rifle shooting). Students Jess Renshaw, Jodi Pilbrow, and Minh Hai Ha won the Dunedin SpringIn2It Challenge, which involved ten weeks of exercise, healthy eating, and drinking of water.

In our last newsletter we told you that we had moved the Christmas "Strawberries and Champagne" to the Alhambra Union Rugby Club rooms. Well this year we have moved venues and changed formats once more, and had a barbecue (with strawberries) at Woodhaugh Gardens. The weather did what it tends to do on these occasions, and looked promising until we arrived, when it started to rain ever so slightly. Not enough to make us all depart, but enough to put a slight damper on proceedings. An unexpected guest was the brand new member of Lynette Brownfield's family, baby James. We also had an amazing surprise when Murray Cockerill appeared, bagpipes in hand, and serenaded us with Scottish melodies! Turns out that Murray was a competitive musician with the pipes as a young man and has retained his expert skills through the years.

Any of you who happen to be in Dunedin at Christmas time are always most welcome to come along to the party - just email us for date and time a month or so in advance.

We hope you enjoyed this newsletter and look forward to hearing from you over the next year.

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

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Best wishes for Christmas and 2013,

from

Kurt Krause and Bronwyn Carlisle, on behalf of

the Biochemistry staff and students

*2012 Christmas
party photos*



*Sue Cutfield with her youngest grandchild,
Neve. Neve's Mum Miriam is a Post-Doc in
the Krause Lab*



Jodi, Jess, and Minh, with their "SpringIn2It" award

We had a ping pong tournament one Happy Hour. Both prizes were won by members of the same lab. The Champion was Wayne Patrick, the booby prize was his PhD student Matteo.



The Patrick Lab: Monica Gerth, Wayne Patrick, and Matteo Ferla.

The third year students' afternoon "poster evening". They present posters they have made in a laboratory session.



Department Publications for 2012

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