

\$5 million Zilkha gift to aid namesake institute's recruitment

By Imelda Valenzuela

Los Angeles businessman and Keck School of Medicine Board of Overseers member Selim Zilkha recently reaffirmed his commitment to the Keck School center that bears his name with a \$5 million gift. The donation will support the Zilkha Neurogenetic Institute (ZNI) and will be used for recruitment of senior scientists and investigators to the institute.

Zilkha's interest in neurogenetic diseases is a personal one: his mother and eldest brother suffered from Alzheimer's disease.

The Zilkha Neurogenetic Institute was established in 2003 with a \$20 million gift from Zilkha. The ZNI is a six-story, 125,000-square-foot building on the Health Sciences Campus, housing 20 researchers who develop therapeutic strategies to attack a multitude of debilitating neurological and psychiatric disorders faced by millions worldwide.

"The research that we're doing at the Zilkha



Jon Nalick

USC President C. L. Max Nikias (left) and members of the Keck School of Medicine Board of Overseers Selim Zilkha (center) and Robert Day meet at a May 18 board meeting in Beverly Hills to announce Zilkha's new \$5 million gift to fund the recruitment of senior scientists to the Zilkha Neurogenetic Institute.

Neurogenetic Institute is research on brain diseases that are not rare—Alzheimer's disease, schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, autism, depression,

anxiety disorder. These are disorders that are affecting almost one in three families in the United States," said Pat Levitt, director of

the Zilkha Neurogenetic Institute, provost professor of neuroscience, psychiatry, psychology and pharmacy,

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'The research that we're doing at the Zilkha Neurogenetic Institute is research on brain diseases ... that are affecting almost one in three families in the United States.'

—Pat Levitt, director of the Zilkha Neurogenetic Institute

Keck School honors donor Norman Levan for generosity, sense of ethics

By Pauline Vu

The Keck School of Medicine honored alumnus Norman Levan, who has pledged about \$10 million for student scholarships and endowed a chair in medical ethics, with gifts that highlight his deep moral convictions.

"He's a true intellectual, very interested in medical ethics and the social circumstances of medicine," said Keck School Dean Carmen A. Puliafito at a May 17 luncheon held at the Ronald Tutor Campus Center on the University Park Campus.

In Levan's honor, the Keck School is

adding a leather-bound special edition of George Eliot's *Middlemarch* to the Norris Medical Library's collection. Puliafito also presented Levan with the bookplates.

Levan has said that *Middlemarch* should be required reading for medical students because of the moral dilemma that surrounds its main character, a doctor, who has lofty plans to improve medicine but compromises his ideals for financial gain.

"Dr. Lydgate moves to the town of Middlemarch and wants to improve medicine there. He marries a very

beautiful and vain girl and he winds up taking money for her," Levan said. "And that's the end of Lydgate."

About 35 people came to the luncheon to honor Levan, who received his bachelor's degree in English from USC in 1935 and graduated from the Keck School in 1939. He is a former chief of dermatology at the Keck School, and he still sees patients once a week in his practice in Bakersfield, where he lives.

He has donated \$2 million to endow the Dr. Norman Levan Chair for Medical Ethics, to which he plans to give another \$2 million. The money Levan is giving to endowed scholarships, which could reach \$10 million, is one of the largest scholarship endowments at the Keck School.

In addition to his generosity to the Health Sciences Campus, Levan also gave \$6 million in 2007 to establish the Levan Institute of Humanities and Ethics at USC. The institute introduces students to a wide range of ideas within the humanities with a focus on ethics.

Levan is "much more than a generous philanthropist. He's a man who is transforming the lives of countless students who will leave this university and go on to change the world," said USC President C. L. Max Nikias, before presenting Levan with a silver platter in



Brian Morri

With help from the USC Trojan Marching Band, the Keck School of Medicine honored alumnus and benefactor Norman Levan (seated center) at a May 17 luncheon at the University Park Campus.

appreciation of his generosity.

The luncheon's attendees included many retired Keck School faculty, as well as Robert Tranquada, the Keck School's dean from 1986 to 1991; Greg Chamberlain, the president of Bakersfield College, to which Levan has given \$18 million; and Carmen Schaad,

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USC hospitals support Haitian nurses

By Tania Chatila

USC University Hospital and USC Norris Cancer Hospital nurses are doing their part to aid medical initiatives around the globe.

The Nurses of USC recently shipped nearly 100 pounds of gently used scrubs to Port Au Prince, Haiti, in support of Project Medishare. Founded in 1994, Project Medishare is a nonprofit organization that provides medical relief, education and support in Haiti.

Nursing collected the scrubs during a two-week drive at the hospitals in March and made the shipment to Haiti a few weeks ago. Leaders acknowledged nursing and support staff for their generosity and support of the cause.

"The hospitals are pleased to have been able to ship 12 large boxes of scrubs to help aid the Haitian nurses in Port Au Prince," said nursing director Kimberly Ternavan, who helped coordinate the drive.

"We proudly support the nursing profession and are in awe of the Haitian nurses and their continued efforts to service their community and country. Thank you to Project Medishare for making it possible for the Nurses of USC to participate and give back," she said.

Keck School honors Uttam Sinha with first Watt Family Chair

By Imelda Valenzuela

Stirring speeches and personal accounts were shared at a reception honoring Uttam Sinha, associate professor and vice chair of otolaryngology-head and neck surgery at the Keck School of Medicine, as he was installed as the first Watt Family Chair in Head and Neck Cancer on April 28.

A resident, a faculty colleague and a patient's family members were on hand to deliver what Keck School Dean Carmen A. Puliafito called a sentimental "This is Your Life"

retrospective, referring to the television series.

"This chair is one of a handful of chairs for head and neck cancer in the country," said Puliafito, addressing 120 guests gathered at the Eli and Edythe Broad CIRM Center for Regenerative Medicine and Stem Cell Research. "Having a chair is the greatest academic honor one could have at a university. It signifies the academic achievement, the clinical expertise and institutional commitment that we expect from our finest faculty members."

Sinha, born and raised in India, was a medical resident from Calcutta University when he arrived at USC 26 years ago.

He saw then for the first time the "limitless potential in the breadth of research that was possible," he said. "The experience created in me my profound commitment to USC, the place I have stayed all these years, and the only academic medical center home I have ever known," said Sinha.

"Three decades later, my drive and inspiration is even stronger, seeing Dean

Puliafito and the senior leadership's pledge to bring the Keck School to newer heights of excellence. I look forward to joining them on this journey and in leading our own department to the ranks of the best in the world. The Watt family has lit the path toward this dream."

The matriarch of the Watt family, Nadine, who experienced a large tumor in her mouth, was a patient of Sinha's. She passed away from unrelated causes in 2009.

Her daughter, Sally Watt Oxley, spoke on the family's behalf and described her mother's care in the hands of Sinha.

"He performed the surgery to perfection and made mother look as beautiful as she was before," said Watt. "Not only did he care for her physical illness, but also her emotional well being. And because of his talents, he vastly improved the quality of her life."

With many ties to USC, the Watt family has donated nearly \$17 million to the school. Watt Way, a major street on the University Park Campus, is named after Nadine's husband, Ray, a former USC

trustee who was instrumental in USC's preparations for the 1984 Olympics.

The gift to support the Department of Otolaryngology-head and neck surgery initially came from Nadine's estate. The family then decided to double the amount to establish the Watt Family Chair in Head and Neck Cancer.

Dennis Maceri, associate professor of clinical otolaryngology and neurosurgery said that Sinha's work ethic is unmatched. "He has a unique passion for treating head and neck cancer patients, not just from the clinical aspect, but his investigative work has been incredible and has led him to be internationally

known for his work," Maceri said. "I am extremely proud to be his colleague, but more than anything, I'm very proud that he's my friend."

One of Sinha's protégés, Grace Peng, who graduated from the Keck School and is now a resident in otolaryngology, described Sinha as "a mentor, a friend and maybe even a third parent."

"Just as he's watched me grow, I've seen his lab expand, his projects multiply, his head and neck institute become a

reality and his accolades stack up," said Peng. "His surgical skill and his mind for translational research aren't his only strengths. He has taught me the value of humility, the importance of passion and the excitement of pursuing lofty goals."

Dale H. Rice, chair of the Department of Otolaryngology-head and neck surgery at the Keck School, has worked with Sinha for 26 years.

"He has developed into one of the world's foremost experts in head and neck surgery," said Rice. "With his breadth of experience and his expression of concern and care for his patients, there is no one more deserving of the Watt chair."



At the April 28 reception honoring Uttam Sinha are, from left, Andrew Jameson, Nadine Watt, Scott Watt, Obaida Watt, Sinha, Sally Watt Oxley and Howard Oxley.

Ryan Ball

'This chair is one of a handful of chairs for head and neck cancer in the country.'

—Keck School of Medicine Dean Carmen A. Puliafito

Etcetera

Becker's Orthopedic & Spine Review, a Chicago-based orthopedic surgery publication, recently named Keck School of Medicine surgeon **Mark J. Spoonamore** among its annual "100 Best Spine Surgeons and Specialists in America" list.

Selectees were chosen for their leadership in prestigious spine institutions, their procedural and technological contributions to the field and other accomplishments in spine surgery.

The Weekly

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UNDERSTANDING HEALTH CARE REFORM—USC Master of Public Health students held a town hall meeting May 7 to discuss the changes that will come with health care reform and how those changes would affect families in the neighborhood surrounding the University Park Campus. MPH students presented information and fact sheets to dozens of attendees about the health reform law and its benefits and protections for the uninsured, children, seniors, businesses and those who already have insurance. USC's Neighborhood Academic Initiative, pre-college enrichment program designed to prepare low-income neighborhood students for admission to the university, hosted the event.

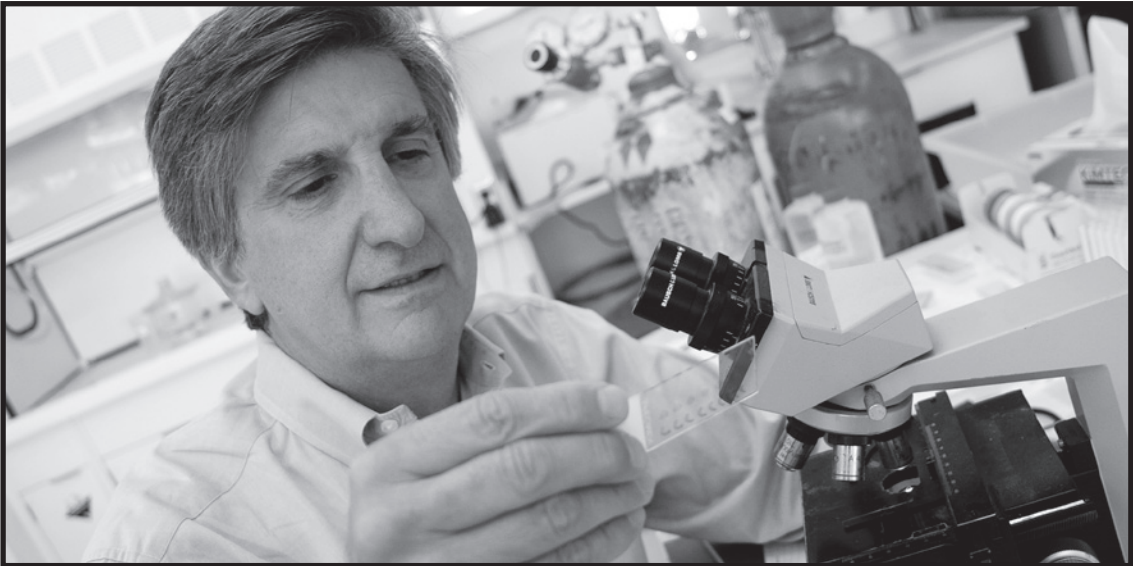
ZILKHA: Gift to help boost senior scientist recruitment

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and chair of the cell and neurobiology department.

Zilkha’s new gift establishes the Zilkha Senior Scholar Award, which will provide funding to offset the cost of recruiting esteemed investigators who have dynamic, grant-funded research programs that focus on specific brain diseases, including Alzheimer’s disease, brain cancer, and neurodegenerative and psychiatric disorders.

The scholar award will be leveraged with university commitments to bring the scholars to the ZNI. The funds provided through the senior scholar award will offset costs of equipment, research staff and trainees, and the like, which are needed to attract the best and brightest minds in the field of translational neuroscience, according to Levitt.

“This pledge of \$5 million is transformative for a number of reasons,” said Levitt. “We



Greg Mancuso

‘This pledge of \$5 million is transformative.’

—Pat Levitt, director of the Zilkha Neurogenetic Institute

will be able to use those dollars to leverage with university funds and other philanthropic funds to be able to recruit senior scientists who already have research programs in Alzheimer’s disease, schizophrenia and autism up and running at other institutions. We want to bring them to the Keck School to be able to multiply the efforts that we already have ongoing.”



Jon Naick

Top, Pat Levitt, director of the Zilkha Neurogenetic Institute, appeared in a video presentation at the Keck School of Medicine Board of Overseers meeting to discuss how Selim Zilkha’s latest gift will help expand the roster of senior scientists at the Zilkha Neurogenetic Institute. Bottom, members of the board hear the gift also will help attract the best and brightest minds in the field of translational neuroscience.

Keck researchers study lasting psychological effects of Chernobyl

By Ryan Ball

As Japan struggled to control radiation from a nuclear power plant damaged by the March 11 tsunami, the world was reminded of the 1986 Chernobyl nuclear disaster 25 years prior. But even before Japan’s crisis, Chernobyl was still on the minds of many. Among them, Jonathan Samet and Sonny Patel of the Keck School of Medicine set out to study the lasting neuropsychological effects on people living in affected areas of Belarus, Moldova, Russia and Ukraine.

Samet, chair of the Department of Preventive Medicine and director of the USC Institute for Global Health, began looking into the lingering psychological effects of the Chernobyl meltdown more than three years ago. Much work has been done in examining risks for cancer and other health consequences of radiation exposure, but

he was also interested in the diverse acute and chronic psychological stressors on the people living around the site.

“You can imagine—just as we’re seeing in Japan—that being disrupted and being told you’ve been exposed to radiation and that you may never come back to your house is pretty traumatic,” said Samet. “I think when you’ve experienced an event that’s big and outside of your control, it scars. People are concerned about their children, and even that concern can be debilitating.”

Samet and research associate Patel compiled a report titled “The Psychological and Welfare Consequences of the Chernobyl Disaster: A Systematic Literature Review, Focus Group Findings and Future Directions.” The document pulls together a wide range of published data and finds evidence of neuropsychological consequences

that remain of public health and medical significance. These range from diminished quality of life and anxiety to depression and specific clinical syndromes such as post-traumatic stress disorder or PTSD.

Patel journeyed to Ukraine and Belarus with partners from Green Cross International, a non-profit organization that provides various social programs for families in the affected areas. Green Cross Switzerland supported the project. He visited a number of these families and worked with local researchers to conduct focus groups aimed at identifying the concerns of local populations. In the process, he found distrust to be one obstacle in the way of healing.



From left are Vladimir Shevtsov, executive director of Green Cross Belarus, Keck School research associate Sonny Patel and Professor Sergei Lialikov, chair of Pediatrics of Grodno State Medical University.

“It’s 25 years since the disaster, and they still feel that they can’t trust the government, the doctors, the health professionals—the people who are trying to assist them,” Patel said.

Samet and Patel hope

their report will help motivate policymakers to see that problems are being diagnosed and recognized, and that the right support services are available. Their findings may even be useful in Japan and with any future disaster.

“We’ve learned a lot of lessons and hopefully some of them will be applied,” said Samet. “I think an important message that will come from our work and the work of others is that, yes, you have to worry about radiation but it’s really a question of getting in right away with the right support and maintaining it.”

Samet’s and Patel’s full report can be downloaded from <http://keck.usc.edu/chernobyl>.

The Weekly NEWSMAKERS

On May 12 ABC News Los Angeles affiliate KABC-TV quoted **Paul Pagnini**, assistant professor of clinical radiation oncology at the Keck School of Medicine, about meningiomas such as the one Mary Tyler Moore had surgically removed recently.

A May 16 article in *Health* quoted **Thomas Hicklin**, assistant professor of clinical psychiatry and behavioral sciences at the Keck School of Medicine, about new research on binge drinking’s impact on the memory, noting that he counsels students at USC’s health clinic.

A May 16 story in The Huffington Post highlighted research by **Pat Levitt**, a neuroscientist and director of the Zilkha Neurogenetic Institute at USC, which studies autistic children who also happen to have gastrointestinal disorders. Levitt’s research has found that when these children’s GI problems have been resolved, they exhibit fewer disabling autistic behaviors.

A May 18 article in *The Telegraph* (U.K.) featured a study by **Carrie Breton**, assistant professor of preventive medicine at the Keck School of Medicine, on smoking during pregnancy. The research was

presented at the recent American Thoracic Society conference. Maternal smoking during gestation has lifelong effects on the offspring, which may occur through specific changes in DNA patterns, the scientists found. *The Daily Mail* (U.K.), Press TV (Iran), United Press International, HealthDay News and *Asian News International* (India) also reported the study.

On May 19 *L.A. Weekly* featured **Henri Ford** of the Keck School among its Best of L.A. People 2011. After the 2010 tsunami, Ford traveled frequently to Haiti to provide free medical care to the victims.

CIRM president details progress of stem cell research in translational medicine

By Ryan Ball
The Dean's Translational Medicine Seminar Series wrapped up its spring season on May 20 with a visit from Alan O. Trounson, president of the California Institute for Regenerative Medicine (CIRM).

Trounson, a pioneer in the field of stem cell research, updated the Keck community on the progress the science is making from the bench to the bedside.

Trounson was introduced by Martin Pera, director of the Eli and Edythe Broad Center for Regenerative Medicine and Stem Cell Research at USC.

"Alan's main priority has always been doing research that matters to people, and I think he's been very successful in that." Pera said of his long-time colleague and friend.

Trounson explained that translating stem cell research to clinical practice is critical to further funding of CIRM. He said it is important for the people of California who voted for Prop. 71 to see a return on the \$3 billion investment.

"I'm a basic scientist and

I love basic science, but I want to get this stuff to the clinics so we get another chance to extend the program," said Trounson, who went on to show how CIRM is globalizing the endeavor by establishing partnerships with researchers around the world.

The CIRM translational portfolio includes 43 grants for early translation and disease teams. Trounson said disease teams working on diabetes and macular degeneration are on the frontline of getting into the clinic because of the low risk of rejection of embryonic stem cells at implantation sites.

Pluripotent stem cells are targets for natural killer cells, and that's a major roadblock for translational success, according to Trounson. He encouraged immunologists to join in the push to address this tolerance issue.

Despite the challenges facing researchers, there have been encouraging



Martin Pera (left), director of the Eli and Edythe Broad Center for Regenerative Medicine and Stem Cell Research at USC, and Zea Borok (right), professor of medicine, greet CIRM President Alan O. Trounson at the May 20 Dean's Translational Medicine Seminar.

Jon Nalick

'I'm a basic scientist and I love basic science, but I want to get [the clinical applications of stem cell research] to the clinics.'

—Alan O. Trounson, president of the California Institute for Regenerative Medicine

breakthroughs in recent months. Trounson mentioned the patient in Berlin who has, by all indications, been cured of HIV by receiving bone marrow cells that were AIDS-resistant due to a mutation.

Trounson hopes to establish alpha stem cell clinics across California. These clinics will initially serve to get patients into clinical trials or to offer sound advice to individuals

who might otherwise go overseas to receive harmful stem cell therapies from disreputable clinics.

"I'm willing to invest money to get these [clinics] up," Trounson said. "I think if nothing happens beyond 2017 and we don't get any refunding, we can leave a footprint of stem cell clinics in California that will go on forever."

CHLA announces creation of Center for Technology and Innovation in Pediatrics

Keck School of Medicine-affiliated Children's Hospital Los Angeles has announced the creation of a new Center for Technology and Innovation in Pediatrics (CTIP).

"Since children differ from adults in their size, anatomy, body chemistry and overall growth and development, there currently exists a need for novel medical devices

specifically designed for them, as well as for the adaptation and validation of existing adult devices for pediatric use," said Chester Koh, director of the Robotic Surgery program at Children's Hospital Los Angeles, co-director of CTIP and assistant professor of clinical urology with the Keck School of Medicine.

The United States Food

and Drug Administration has estimated that the development of pediatric medical devices lags behind the development of adult devices by five to 10 years.

This delay is a result of economic, clinical and regulatory challenges, as well as a lack of established mechanisms for joining pediatric device ideas with

qualified individuals, programs and industry partners.

To tackle this problem, Children's Hospital Los Angeles is uniting programs, institutes, faculty and students, along with industry and venture capital partners, in a topic-focused, systems-oriented approach.

"Our long-term plans are for CTIP to sustain a produc-

tive pipeline of new pediatric devices at Children's Hospital and USC so that we can make a difference in the lives of patients right now, as well as looking forward to improvements that will have a positive impact on their future," said Brent Polk, director of The Saban Research Institute and chair of the Department of Pediatrics at the Keck School.

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Calendar of Events

This Calendar of events is also online at www.usc.edu/hscalendar for the Health Sciences Campus community

Saturday, June 4

8 a.m. – 4 p.m. Continuing Medical Education Seminar. "Pulmonary Updates 2011," Various speakers. Los Angeles Marriott Hotel, Downtown Los Angeles. Info: (323) 442-2547

8:30 – noon. USC Norris Festival of Life: Celebrating All Cancer Survivors. HSC Harry and Celesta Pappas Quad. Info: (323) 865-3169

Friday, June 17

1 p.m. – 2:30 p.m. "LAC+USC Breathmobile 15th Anniversary Celebration," Pete Delgado, CEO, LAC+USC Health Network. 1100 N. State St., Los Angeles. Info: (800) 624-0044

Notice: Deadline for calendar submission is 4 p.m. Monday to be considered for that week's issue—although three weeks' advance notice of events is recommended. Please note that timely submission does not guarantee an item will be printed. Send calendar items to *The Weekly*, KAM 400 or fax to (323) 442-2832, or e-mail to ebalauw@usc.edu. Entries must include day, date, time, title of talk, first and last name of speaker, affiliation of speaker, location, and a phone number for information.

LEVAN: Donor stresses ethics

Continued from page 1
Levan's office manager, who inspired him to begin donating a few years ago so that he could see the results of his generosity firsthand.

The event ended with a surprise performance from the Trojan Marching Band and three song girls, an honor reserved for few people, Puliafito noted. The attendees clapped along to the rousing music and made the Trojan "V for victory" sign.

"My good friend and office manager, Carmen, has been urging me to acquire humility, but that's a little hard to do with an event like this," Levan said.



In case of an emergency...

Call the Emergency Information Phone: 213-740-9233 The emergency telephone system can handle 1,400 simultaneous calls. It also has a backup system on the East Coast.

Visit the USC Web: <http://emergency.usc.edu> This page will be activated in case of an emergency. Backup Web servers on the East Coast will function if the USC servers are incapacitated.