CHLA receives $11 million from estate of filmmaker Billy Wilder

By Tania Chatila

USC Norris Cancer Hospital remodel offers a whole new look

Keck School of Medicine-affiliated Children’s Hospital Los Angeles announced on Dec. 20 that the estate of the legendary Oscar-winning filmmaker Billy Wilder and his wife, Audrey, made an $11 million gift to the hospital’s new endowed chair in the division of neurosurgery and to the hospital’s endowment in neurosurgery.

“With the new technology and the spectacular upgrades, [USC Norris] feels up to date with today’s standards of a high quality hospital,” said Bryan Ezralow of the Ezralow family for which the inpatient tower at USC Norris is named. Ezralow was one of more than 150 visitors and staff who toured the renovations at a special open house last month. “It makes me happy that USC continues to do the right thing for its patients and our community. It’s the patient experience that really makes a difference between a good hospital and a great hospital.”

The renovations come as USC Norris prepares to grow its inpatient population. In March the stewardship of Chief of Medical Staff Mark Krieger, head of the hospital’s neurosurgery division and assistant professor of pediatrics at the Keck School.

Of the remaining gift, $1.5 million is to be distributed to the endowed chair of the hospital’s newly established inter-departmental Neuron-Oncology Program under the direction of Jonathan Finlay, director of the Children’s Hospital Los Angeles Neural Tumors Program within the Children’s Center for Cancer and Blood Diseases. In addition, $800,000 will be earmarked to complete the Hay Edward Baker Chair in Pediatric Rheumatology, which will be held by Andreas Reiff, chief of the division of rheumatology and professor of pediatrics at the Keck School. The remaining donation will go toward the hospital’s underfunded and unreimbursed hospital programs that help the more than 96,000 young patients Children’s Hospital Los Angeles treats annually.

“We are incredibly thankful and humbled by the incredible gift to the utmost in the leadership ability to utilize this gift to the utmost in the treatment and care of our patients and to strengthen and expand the services we offer,” said Laurie Stone, executive director of the Children’s Hospital Los Angeles Trust, the hospital’s newly established endowed chair in the division of neurosurgery and to the hospital’s endowment in neurosurgery.

In recognition of the gift from The Wilder Family Trust, the hospital will name the new neurosurgery chair the Billy and Audrey Wilder Endowed Chair in Neurosurgery, which will receive $5 million of the donation. In addition, $3 million will be dedicated to the new Billy and Audrey Wilder Endowment in Neurosurgery, a hospital clinical care program under the leadership of Andreas Reiff, chief of the division of rheumatology and professor of pediatrics at the Keck School.

By Hope Hamashige

Beautification plan under way to make HSC look more like a campus

A $35 million project to improve the Health Sciences campus will feature wider sidewalks and decorative brick accents—features reminiscent of those on the University Park campus. Above are before-and-after images of the planned renovation on San Pablo Street at Hospital Drive.

This generous and amazing gift will impact the lives and future treatment of children diagnosed with life-threatening and often devastating diagnoses.”

—Richard D. Cordova, president and CEO of Children’s Hospital Los Angeles
USC researchers find clue to how Hepatitis C virus harms the liver

By Leslie Ridgeway

USC researchers have discovered a trigger by which the Hepatitis C virus enters liver cells—shedding light on how this serious and potentially deadly virus can begin to damage the liver.

The findings, reported in the Dec. 7, 2012, issue of the Journal of Biological Chemistry, may give scientists a target for future development of treatments for the virus.

In the early stages of a Hepatitis C virus (HCV) infection, the researchers found, the virus binds to receptors on the liver cells’ surface and activates PI3K and AKT. Two proteins that control cell growth and metabolism, which allow HCV to enter liver cells.

“When these two protein factors are activated, they trigger a cascade of reactions, altering the physiology of infected cells,” said corresponding author and lead researcher James Ou, professor of molecular microbiology and immunology at the Keck School of Medicine of USC.

“Later, by continuing to disturb this pathway, the virus may sensitize the liver cells to eventually become cancerous.”

The findings were reported in a paper titled “Transient Activation of the PI3K-AKT Pathway by Hepatitis C Virus to Enhance Viral Entry.” First author was Zhe Liu, a postdoctoral research associate in Ou’s lab. Serving as co-investigators were Keck School faculty members Keigo Machida, assistant professor of molecular microbiology and immunology; and Michael M.C. Lau, distinguished emeritus professor of microbiology and immunology, and neurology.

There are four million carriers of HCV in the U.S. Often, people don’t know that they have the virus until they already have some liver damage, which can take many years to develop. In the future, it is possible that the virus can lead to serious and deadly liver conditions: cirrhosis, a chronic, degenerative condition; cancer; and organ failure.

By Amy E. Hamaker

A $125,000 gift to the University of Southern California’s Norris Comprehensive Cancer Center will enhance the business of medicine at Keck.

The gift, which will establish the Nagelberg Business of Medicine Fund to support the development of a core business of medicine curriculum, will help to bring the business of medicine to Keck.

“Compynes that disrupt the PI3K-AKT pathway are a potential target for developing treatments for HCV,” said Zhe Liu, lead author of the study.

The findings were reported in the Dec. 7, 2012, issue of the Journal of Biological Chemistry. They give scientists a target for future development of treatments for the virus.

In the early stages of a HCV infection, the virus binds to receptors on the liver cells’ surface and activates PI3K and AKT. Two proteins that control cell growth and metabolism, which allow HCV to enter liver cells.

“When these two protein factors are activated, they trigger a cascade of reactions, altering the physiology of infected cells,” said corresponding author and lead researcher James Ou, professor of molecular microbiology and immunology at the Keck School of Medicine of USC.

“Later, by continuing to disturb this pathway, the virus may sensitize the liver cells to eventually become cancerous.”

The findings were reported in a paper titled “Transient Activation of the PI3K-AKT Pathway by Hepatitis C Virus to Enhance Viral Entry.” First author was Zhe Liu, a postdoctoral research associate in Ou’s lab. Serving as co-investigators were Keck School faculty members Keigo Machida, assistant professor of molecular microbiology and immunology; and Michael M.C. Lau, distinguished emeritus professor of microbiology and immunology, and neurology.

There are four million carriers of HCV in the U.S. Often, people don’t know that they have the virus until they already have some liver damage, which can take many years to develop. In the future, it is possible that the virus can lead to serious and deadly liver conditions: cirrhosis, a chronic, degenerative condition; cancer; and organ failure.
Delegation of Thai physicians studies USC’s joint replacement program

By Hapho Hamsabhi

When the Bumrungrad International Hospital in Bangkok, Thailand, decided to open a joint replacement center, they decided they wanted to model their program after the program at Keck Hospital of USC.

With that in mind, a delegation of 16 doctors, nurses, physical therapists and administrators from the Department of Orthopaedic Surgery spent a week with Lawrence D. Dorr, professor of orthopaedic surgery at the Keck School of Medicine of USC, observing how he and his staff handle the joint replacement program at Keck Hospital.

“They are interested in every aspect of this,” said Jeri Ward, director of joint replacement services at the hospital. “They want to look at our marketing materials, they want to see how we handle the work flow and how quickly patients begin their physical therapy.”

Siripong Ratanachai, an orthopaedic surgeon and incoming director of the joint replacement center at Bumrungrad International Hospital, observed several operations in which Dorr used a robot to improve the accuracy of the replacement and, hopefully, the longevity of the prostheses.

Several members of the Thai medical delegation expressed surprise when they learned that most patients at Keck are on their feet and out the door within a day or two.

“That is why the board of our hospital send us here,” explained Ratanachai. “They know Dr. Dorr’s methods and they believe in him.”

By Alison Trinidad

Scientists at the Keck School of Medicine of USC have found evidence that liver mitochondria in mice adapt to become better methanol metabolizers and increase in number after chronic exposure, which may raise the potential for free radical damage associated with smoking and cancer over time.

The liver is a vital organ, playing a major role in metabolism and detoxification in the body. Overconsumption of alcohol has long been tied to liver disorders such as fatty liver, alcoholic hepatitis and cirrhosis, but how the substance damages the organ is not fully understood.

USC research published in the Dec. 7, 2012, issue of the Journal of Biological Chemistry, a peer-reviewed scientific journal, suggests that mitochondria play an important role in the liver’s response to the metabolic stress caused by alcohol intake. If scientists observe the same results in human mitochondria, it could help pinpoint targets for therapy.

“The liver has to adapt quickly to various toxins and drugs to meet the demands we place on the body,” said Derick Han, assistant professor of research medicine at the Keck School and first author of the study. “We’ve found that mitochondrial plasticity—the mitochondria’s ability to change—is probably central to the liver’s response to alcohol intake. This gives us a better understanding of how the liver works and how it adapts to stress.”

Mitochondria are cellular organelles that generate most of the cell’s energy, they have been implicated in certain neurological disorders and have been tied to aging. The metabolism of oxygen by the mitochondria normally generates reactive oxygen species, or free radicals, which in excess can be highly damaging to cells.

“In the short term, it looks like mitochondria adapt to metabolize alcohol better, but as they increase in number and use more oxygen to help metabolize that alcohol, it could be harmful to the body,” Han said.

Han and his team of scientists fed alcohol to mice over four weeks, isolated the liver mitochondria and measured levels of respiration and changes in the mitochondrial structure. They found significant increases in oxygen consumption by mice fed the alcohol in comparison to control mitochondria as early as one week after feeding.

Changes were greater and more extensive with higher alcohol intake.

USC co-authors include Maria Yuanez, Heather Johnson, Jeniece McDonald, Lusine Mesropan, Harsh Sancheti, Lily Dara and Enrique Cadenas. The study’s senior investigators include Hidekazu Ikukamo, director of the Southern California Research Center for Alcoholic Liver and Pancreatic Diseases (ALPD) and Cinhoss, and Neil Kaplanowitz, director of the USC Research Center for Liver Diseases. The study was supported by the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism of the National Institutes of Health (grants AA016911, AA14428, and AAH1999).

A team led by Kaplanowitz is set to launch a four-year clinical trial in 2013 to study two potential new treatments for alcoholic hepatitis.

Han hopes to collect data from that trial to further examine mitochondrial function in humans exposed to alcohol.

Women’s health event slated for Jan. 26

The Keck School of Medicine will host the second annual Women’s Health Symposium, on Jan. 26.

The event, from 11 a.m. to 4:15 p.m., will be held at the Keck Administration Building.

The free symposium is open to students from throughout Southern California.

To RSVP or for more information about the schedule of events, visit http://usc.edu/1sj and enter code 0126.

The Weekly NEWSMAKERS

Daniel Oakes, associate professor of orthopaedic surgery at the Keck School of Medicine, cardiologist Leslie Saxon, professor of clinical medicine at the Keck School of Medicine, and Andrew Fabello, a nurse at Keck Hospital of USC.

A Jan. 4 story in The Sacramento Bee quoted George “Rick” Hatch, assistant professor of clinical orthopaedics at the Keck School of Medicine, about the healing time for torn tendons.

A Jan. 4 broadcast on ABC News quoted Tracy Zaslow, assistant professor of clinical orthopaedics at the Keck School of Medicine, about how to prevent sports injuries among children.

A Jan. 4 article in Everyday Health quoted Mark Sponsamone, assistant professor of clinical orthopaedics at the Keck School of Medicine, about the differences between sprains and strains.

A Jan. 3 broadcast by ABC News quoted James Tibone, professor of clinical orthopaedics at the Keck School of Medicine, about the use of an anti-inflammatory drug often used for pain relief.

A Jan. 3 articles in the La Canada Valley Sun and Glendale News Press note that the Keck Medical Center of USC is in negotiations to partner with Verdugo Hills Hospital. Becker’s Hospital Review also covered the story.

A Jan. 1 article in Daily Mail (U.K.) featured research led by Kathleen Page, assistant professor of clinical medicine at the Keck School of Medicine, finding that people who consumed certain sugars had a more difficult time losing weight than those who consumed other types of sugar.
Keck School alum gift supports a physician from the next generation

By Molly Gervais

Looking back on his own successful career, a retired physician and Keck School of Medicine of USC alumnus Michael Mertens decided to try a new way of helping others through medicine: personally funding the education of a young USC medical student. Specifically, Mertens chose to provide tuition assistance for student Antonio Olivarez during his four years at the Keck School.

Regarding the gift, Mertens said, “I feel I’m at a time in my life when I need to give back. I have had the opportunity to meet Antonio in person on several occasions, and it’s wonderful to see him go home alive in him. I had forgotten what it was like to be so young and enthusiastic. reconnecting with my alma mater through Antonio has been an incredible experience.”

Mertens is a retired diagnostic radiologist who practiced in Reston, Va., before retiring. Mertens graduated from the Keck School in 1965, and after completing his internship in radiology, he joined the Air Force and became a flight surgeon. Mertens currently lives in McLean, Va.

Olivarez, a second-year medical student at the Keck School, grew up in San Jose with his parents and three younger sisters.

“I come from a culturally traditional Spanish-American family,” explained Oliva-rez. “My parents immigrated to the United States from Mexico, and I’m the first in my family to go to college—and medical school for that matter.” Olivarez received a Bachelor of Science degree in neurobiology, physiology, and behavior from the University of California, Davis.

Olivarez added, “Many of my personal, family, and college experiences shaped my desire to pursue the career of medicine. I’m attending medical school because I have an internal obligation to serve low-income Latino communities in dire need of medical assistance. In today’s society, there’s a cultural and economic gap that plagues patients who are either economically disadvantaged or are immigrants from other countries. “As a Spanish-speaking Latino who grew up in a Mexican household, I feel that I can be an asset in the promotion of accessible health care assistance to underrepresented minorities,” he continued. “As a future physician, I plan to practice clinical medicine as a primary care physician with an emphasis in working within underserved communities.”

Olivarez is a member of the Chicano/Latino Medical Student Association at the Keck School, which has fulfilled his desire to mentor young Latinos interested in a career in medicine. “If it weren’t for the support system and inspiration of my medical student mentors, I wouldn’t have gotten to where I am today,” he said. “I’m exceedingly grateful and appreciative.”

WILDER: Estate makes key gift to CHLA

Continued from Page 7

Audrey Wilder, who passed away in June, was married to Billy Wilder for 53 years. She was a singer with the Tommy Dorsey Band and appeared in several films in the 1940s. In 1944, she met her future husband on the set of The Lost Weekend, a film that garnered Billy Wilder the first of his two film directing Oscars. They wed five years later. The Austrian-born Billy Wilder received international recognition as one of the world’s great filmmakers. His Hollywood career as a writer, director and producer spanned five decades, and his work included such popular classics as Sabrina and Some Like It Hot and Oscar winners like Sunset Boulevard, The Apartment and The Lost Weekend. Renowned for his ability to cross film genres, Wilder became the first individual to win three Oscars in one night when The Apartment (1960) earned the filmmaker awards for directing, producing and co-writing.

In all, he won six Academy Awards and also earned the Academy’s Irving G. Thalberg Memorial Award in 1988. He won the National Medal of Arts in 1993, nine years before his passing in 2002.

Calendar of Events

Tuesday, Jan. 15

12:30 p.m.–2 p.m., USC Institute for Integrative Health Seminar. “Interactive Entertainment for the Art and Sciences of Imagination, Somatic Gratification and Presence.” Marisolina Gómez, USC. UPC: SCA 465. Info: (323) 442-2638

Tuesday, Jan. 17


Tuesday, Jan. 22


Wednesday, Jan. 30

8 a.m., Department of Pathology and Laboratory Medicine Grand Rounds. “Cold Case Investigations – the LA County Coroner Experience.” Lakshmanan Sathyavagiswaran, USC & UCLA. NOR Topping Tower 7-409. Info: (323) 442-1180

Noon, Zilkha Neurogenetic Institute Seminar. “VAAST A Probabilistic Disease-Gene Finder for Personal Genomes.” Mark TondURY, University of Utah. ZNI 112. Info: (323) 442-2144

Thursday, Feb. 21


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 email to ebibue@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.