HSC News

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Photos by Les Dunseith

Lynn Ngai and Phil Wu nervously open their envelopes, then celebrate their successful match together.

Medical students open envelopes and learn their fates on Match Day

By Sharon Brock

At 8:55 a.m., fourth-year medical students and engaged couple Lynn Ngai and Phil Wu held hands and their breaths — hoping to match in the same residency program come July.

Ngai and Wu were among 167 excited and hopeful USC medical students who gathered March 20 in Harry and Celesta Pappas Quad for the annual Match Day, joining 17,000 graduating U.S. medical students who opened envelopes together and learned where they would spend the next few years of their lives.

Medical students rank their preferences for residency programs, and residency programs rank students. The lists are combined and matches are made using a computer algorithm by the non-profit National Resident Matching Program.

Shuhan He hugs Mary Wang after he successfully matched with his first choice in Boston.

Miriam Lassiter holding her dog, Balou: "He helped me all the way through school."

Moments before the fateful hour of 9 a.m., the crowd shouted "5…4…3…2…1… woo hoo!," then students scurried off to peel open their envelopes with excitement. Shrieks and screams echoed across the quad as tears flowed and students dispersed to share their news with family and friends.

"I'm going to the beach," exclaimed T.C. Scotton, who matched with the UCLA Semel Institute for

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$50 million gift endows USC brain research institute

A USC alumnus and his wife are donating $50 million to a USC brain research institute to advance progress in understanding one of biology's most complex and important puzzles: the brain.

The gift from Mark and Mary Stevens will endow and name the USC Mark and Mary Stevens Neuroimaging and Informatics Institute. Located at the Keck School of Medicine of USC on the Health Sciences Campus, the institute partners with schools and programs on both campuses, given the tremendously interdisciplinary nature of its work. In addition to collaborating closely with the USC Viterbi School of Engineering, the institute works with faculty in biology, genetics, biostatistics, computer science, mathematics, pharmacology and numerous other disciplines.

The Stevens' gift promises to improve the lives of people worldwide by quickening the translation of basic research into new therapies, preventions and cures for brain injury and disease, including Alzheimer's, schizophrenia and traumatic brain injury.

In an interview with the *Los Angeles Times*, Mark Stevens said that he and his wife consider neuroscience to be "the next great frontier in medicine and science."

Stevens said in the interview that he has "a front row seat" to the toll of such neurological diseases as Alzheimer's, from which his father suffers. "If you look at the spectrum of neurological disorders, I would argue that it touches more families than cancer and heart disease. It touches youth and it touches old age," said Stevens.

Led by professors Arthur Toga, PhD, and Paul Thompson, PhD, along with a team of more than 130 faculty and scientific staff, the institute and its Laboratory of Neuro Imaging were brought to USC in 2013. Over its three decades, the institute has amassed the world's largest repository of

See **GIFT**, page 3

Keck scientists pave the way for possible cure of asthma

By Alison Trinidad

Scientists led by molecular immunologists at the Keck School of Medicine of USC have identified a way to target a recently discovered cell type that causes asthma, opening the door to cure the chronic respiratory disease that affects 25 million Americans.

The team, which includes investigators from Janssen Research and Development, Dana-Farber Cancer Institute and Harvard Medical School, published its results in the March 17 edition of the peer-reviewed scientific journal *Immunity*.

Asthma is a chronic lung disease that irritates and narrows the airways, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. With no known cure for the 7 million children who suffer from this disease in the United States, as well as millions of adults, the goal of asthma treatment is to control the symptoms.

The exact causes of the chronic disease are unknown, but researchers believe a combination of genetic and environmental factors contribute to developing asthma. Discovered within the last decade, type 2 innate lymphoid cells, or ILC2s, are a subset of immune cells that trigger primary asthma symptoms such as mucus production and hypersensitive airways. ILC2s do not express previously identified immune cell markers, however, making

See **ASTHMA**, page 3

Kate Santiago

Allison Sarff Luu, MD, assists an ailing runner.

250 volunteers from USC offer medical care at L.A. Marathon

Amid a heat wave, 250 volunteers from the Keck School of Medicine's Department of Emergency Medicine and other Keck of USC staff offered aid to runners in the annual L.A. Marathon on March 15.

Officials said about 2,000 people were treated by medical personnel along the route.

Volunteers who staffed the 12 medical stations along the course and at the finish line included medical students from the Keck School of Medicine, plus students and professionals that included physical therapists, physicians assistants, medical assistants, nurses, and resident and attending physicians from LAC+USC, Harbor-UCLA and UCLA-Olive

See **MARATHON**, page 2

Kate Santiago

Edward Newton, MD, interim chair at LAC+USC, talks with Kevin Hardiman, DO, chief resident, inside a marathon medical station.

Stem cell event spotlights next generation

By Cristy Lytal

Obesity, narcolepsy, leukemia and muscle injuries have at least one thing in common — they are engaging the next generation of top stem cell scientists.

Five of these scientists presented their research March 3 at the Junior Faculty Candidate Mini-Symposium hosted by USC's Department of Stem Cell Biology and Regenerative Medicine:

Hao Yuan Kueh, PhD, from the California Institute of Technology introduced his research about so-called gene circuits in the immune systems of mammals. These complex networks of genes work together to control whether immune stem cells replicate themselves or differentiate into more specialized cell types: macrophages and T-cells. Using a combination of experimental and mathematical approaches, Kueh has offered a potential strategy for understanding the development of normal immune cells, as well as bettering human health.

Florian Merkle, PhD, from Harvard University described converting stem cells into the brain cells that malfunction in two common diseases: obesity and narcolepsy. He created a technique for safely studying these diseases in the laboratory by producing three types of brain cells: hypocretin (HCRT) neurons that promote wakefulness, agouti-related peptide (AGRP) neurons that promote feeding, and pro-opiomelanocortin (POMC) neurons that inhibit feeding. This research could pave the way for correcting mutations or transplanting replacement neurons into patients with these and other diseases.

Robert A.J. Signer, PhD, from the University of Texas, Southwestern, described an important difference between blood-forming, or hematopoietic, stem cells (HSCs) and partially or fully differentiated blood cells. Individual HSCs synthesize far less protein than their more differentiated counterparts. Subtle changes to this level of protein synthesis can promote or prevent aging and diseases, including leukemia, anemia and bone marrow failure.

Joseph T. Rodgers, PhD, from Stanford University discussed how stem cells repair and regenerate tissue, including muscle, skin and bone. Injury activates nearby stem cells and also puts more distant stem cells on alert, preparing the entire body to help with repair if needed. Rodgers has identified some of the key molecular signals that put these stem cells on alert — including a protein called hepatocyte growth factor (HGF) that could potentially be injected into patients to stimulate wound healing.

Pedro Batista, PhD, from Stanford University began his talk by declaring his passion for messenger RNA (mRNA), which carries genetic information from DNA to the cell's protein-making machinery. Much of this mRNA has been chemically modified by a molecule called "N6-methlyadenosine (m6A)." Batista has made inroads into the mystery of these modifications by finding that m6A enables stem cells to differentiate into specific cell types, and it prevents tumor formation.

Andy McMahon, PhD, FRS, chair of the Department of Stem Cell Biology and Regenerative Medicine, concluded the day's activities by offering his enthusiastic thanks to these six leading candidates for junior faculty positions at USC.

"It's a real treat to have five individuals of the caliber of the five that are visiting," he said. "It was an excellent series of very diverse talks."

Cristy Lytal

Among the day's presenters was Joseph T. Rodgers of Stanford University, who discussed how stem cells repair and regenerate tissue.

Courtesy American Cancer Society

Jonathan Samet, center, receives the 2015 Luther L. Terry Award for Distinguished Career from the American Cancer Society. Also pictured are John Seffrin and Tom Glynn of the American Cancer Society.

Samet receives career award from American Cancer Society

By Sara Reeve

Jonathan Samet, MD, MS, Distinguished Professor and holder of the Flora L. Thornton Chair in the Department of Preventive Medicine at the Keck School of USC, has dedicated his career to the issue of tobacco use and regulation. That dedication has now been recognized on the world stage. Samet, who is also the director of the USC Institute for Global Health, was honored with the 2015 Luther L. Terry Award for Distinguished Career from the American Cancer Society. The award was presented at the 16th World Conference on Tobacco or Health, held in Abu Dhabi on March 19.

Named for the late United States Surgeon General Luther L. Terry, MD, whose work established the foundation for public understanding of the health dangers of tobacco use, the awards recognize outstanding worldwide achievement in the field of tobacco control.

"For more than three decades, my research has addressed the tobacco epidemic and how to control it, in the United States and globally," said Samet. "I am deeply honored to receive an award from the American Cancer Society named after Luther Terry, the U.S. Surgeon General who released the landmark 1964 Surgeon General's report on tobacco and health — the first in a series of 31 reports." Samet served as the senior scientific editor for the 50th anniversary report in 2014.

The Luther L. Terry Awards are presented in six categories: Outstanding Individual Leadership, Outstanding Organization, Outstanding Research Contribution, Exemplary Leadership by a Government Ministry, Distinguished Career, and Outstanding Community Service.

While Samet may have received this award for his "distinguished career," that career is not over — he pays close attention to tobacco-related issues that still pose public health concerns.

"We have made great progress in the United States in controlling tobacco use — our state, California, has long been a leader," said Samet. "But, there is much to do as the tobacco epidemic persists in many groups within the United States and threatens to grow in many lower-income countries. Of course, there is the new challenge of the explosive rising of electronic cigarettes."

Calendar of Events

Saturday, March 28

8 a.m. – 3 p.m. KSOM of USC, Department of Anesthesiology Symposium. "1st Annual Practice Management Conference for SOCAL Anesthesiology Residents." Mayer Auditorium. Info & RSVP: Renee Meadows, (323) 409-6856, rmeadows@usc.edu. Registration/Breakfast: 7:00 am. This is a free conference. Breakfast and lunch are included.

Monday, March 30

Noon. Office of Emergency Management & Business Continuity Lecture. Bring Your Lunch and Learn Seminar. "Active Shooter, Remaining Prepared in a Run, Hide, Fight World,"Robert C. Vance III, USC. Keck Hospital Cardinal Conference Room. Info: Bob Vance, (323) 442-9915, robert.vance@med.usc.edu

Noon. KSOM Research Seminar Series Seminar. "Regulation of Genomic Binding Site Selection by Steroid Receptor Coactivators," Michael R. Stallcup, PhD, USC. Aresty Auditorium. Info: Mary Jane Chua, (323) 442-7732, maryjane.chua@med.usc.edu

Tuesday, March 31

11 a.m. Broad CIRM Center Seminar. "Regulation of Wnt/Beta-Catenin Activity in Nephron Progenitor Cell Renewal and Differentiation," Thomas Carroll, PhD, University of Texas. Eli and Edythe Broad CIRM Center Auditorium.

Noon. USC Institute for Global Health Lecture. "Promises & Limitations of Gender-Transformative Health Programming with Men: Critical Reflections from the Field," Shari L. Dworkin, PhD, MS, UCSF. TCC, Rm 450. Info: Nivvy Hundal, (323) 865-0419, global.health@usc.edu

4 p.m. Dean's Distinguished Lecturer Series. "Creating a High Performing Health System," David Blumenthal, MD, MPP. Keith Administration Building, Mayer Auditorium. RSVP: www.usc.edu/esvp, code: Blumenthal

5:30 p.m. Ophthalmology Grand Rounds. Stavros Moysidis, MD, USC. HC4 Conference Room, 3rd Floor. Info: Tyaisha Christopher, (323) 441-8034, Tyaisha.Christopher@med.usc.edu

Wednesday, April 1

Noon. Zilkha Neurogenetic Institute Seminar. "Molecular Mechanisms Underlying the Demise of Neurons," Hugo Bellen, DVM, PhD, Baylor College of Medicine. Herklotz Seminar Room, ZNI 112. Info: Julie Carl, (323) 442-3219, jcarl@usc.edu

4:30 p.m. KSOM of USC, Department of Anesthesiology Lecture. "5th Annual Vladimir Zelman Distinguished and Endowed Lectureship," Yevgeny Yevtushenko and James Ragan. Aresty Auditorium. Info: Renee Meadows, (323) 409-6856, rmeadows@usc.edu. Reception, 4:30; lecture, 5:15 p.m.

Thursday, April 2

Noon. Southern California Research Center for ALPD & Cirrhosis Lecture. "Catenin Signaling in Liver Pathophysiology: Implications in Regeneration and Cancer," Satdarshan (Paul) Singh Monga, University of Pittsburgh. McKibben Lecture Hall, 156. Info: Julie Lee, (323) 442-4844 julie.lee@med.usc.edu

4:30 p.m. Jane Anne Nohl Division of Hematology and Center for the Study of Blood Diseases Lecture. "The 2015 Donald I. Feinstein, MD Distinguished Lectureship: A Unifying Theory of Thrombus Formation," Bruce Furie, MD, Harvard Medical School. NTT 7409. Info: Cathy Bergren, (323) 865-3913, cbergren@usc.edu

Notice: Calendar items are due at least 10 days before publication date. Timely submission does not guarantee publication in print. See more calendar entries at *hscnews.usc.edu/calendar-of-events*. Submit items at *tinyurl.com/calendar-hsc*. Include day, date, time, title of talk, first and last name of speaker, affiliation of speaker, location and a phone number/email address.

MARATHON: USC aids runners

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View. Nurses from Keck Hospital of USC also joined the effort.

Because of the heat, marathon organizers arranged special "cooling stations" and moved up the start time of the race by half an hour.

As in years past, many organizations coordinated fund-raising activities with marathon participation. One example was a partnership between the Adolescent and Young Adult Cancer Program at USC (AYA@USC) and the Concern Foundation that raised nearly $18,000 for the adolescent and young adult cancer program at USC Norris Comprehensive Cancer Center.

Gala raises $290,000 for medical scholarships

Almost 300 people were on hand March 7 at Town & Gown of USC to celebrate and raise funds for medical scholarships at the Keck Scholarship Gala. The event raised $290,000.

Carmen A. Puliafito, MD, MBA, dean of the Keck School of Medicine of USC, told those in attendance that their donations enable exceptional students to pursue medical studies, conduct research and assist with hands-on patient care regardless of their socio-economic circumstances.

"We can only compete to attract the best and brightest students — men and women who will ultimately become our future residents, faculty, physicians and researchers — by offering full and partial scholarship," Puliafito told the crowd. "Your generosity will impact not only the excellent training of our talented medical students, but also the lives of the many patients they will help throughout their careers."

The event's emcee was Fritz Coleman, longtime weathercaster for KNBC-TV in Los Angeles. Coleman has been active in charitable causes throughout his 32-year career as a local on-air personality.

Emeritus Professor Shaul G. Massry, MD, was awarded the Distinguished Faculty Award during the festivities. Massry is the former chair of nephrology at the Keck School of Medicine and president of the Meira and Shaul G. Massry Foundation, which awards the Massry Prize to recognize outstanding contributions to the biomedical sciences and the advancement of health.

Receiving the Alumni Service Award was Antonio T. Alamo, MD, a 1991 graduate of the Keck School of Medicine. He runs an internal medicine practice in Las Vegas and chairs Nevada's gaming commission.

The recipient of the Distinguished Alumni Merit Award was J. Mario Molina, MD, who earned his medical degree from USC in 1984. He is president and CEO of the Fortune 500 company Molina Healthcare, Inc.

During the event, 31 Keck School scholarship recipients were recognized by Henri R. Ford, MD, MHA, vice dean of educational affairs.

The gala also included a cocktail reception in Town & Gown's courtyard and foyer. Sponsors of the event included Keck Medical Center of USC, the USC Institute of Urology and the USC Office of Diversity, plus several Keck School departments.

Photos by Steve Cohn

A total of 31 medical students received their scholarships during the March 7 gala at Town & Gown.

Gala attendees, from left, included Dean Carmen A. Puliafito, alumni honorees Antonio T. Alamo and J. Mario Molina, Distinguished Faculty winner Shaul G. Massry and Vice Dean Henri Ford.

Emcee Fritz Coleman of KNBC-TV receives a plaque from Dean Carmen A. Puliafito to commemorate the event.

GIFT: Mark and Mary Stevens Neuroimaging and Informatics Institute

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healthy and diseased brain images, along with medical and cognitive data from around the globe.

"With this landmark gift, Mark and Mary Stevens enhance their already spectacular philanthropic legacy," said USC President C. L. Max Nikias. "They significantly widen the scope of their support for American higher education and bring their philanthropy to particularly pressing and important areas of inquiry. Neuroscience has been called 'the final frontier' in medical science's progress toward a fuller understanding of human life and human health. Through the Stevens' support, USC researchers will have the opportunity to address many of the most pressing questions in medicine today."

ASTHMA: USC researchers are zeroing in on a potential cure

Continued from page 1

them tough to target.

"If we can target ILC2s, we might be able to cure asthma or exacerbations caused by these particular cells," said Omid Akbari, PhD, associate professor of molecular and cellular immunology at the Keck School and principal investigator of the study. "In this study, we discovered molecules critical to ILC2 homeostasis, survival and function. We believe that targeting these molecules or related pathways could one day cure a patient with ILC2-dependent asthma."

Akbari's team used mouse and human cells to show that inducible T cell costimulator molecules (ICOS) and their interaction with ICOS-ligand (ICOS-L) are crucial for ILC2 function and survival. ICOS and ICOS-L are proteins that influence cell behavior and cell response. Akbari's team developed a humanized mouse model to show how human ILC2s function in vivo; the model is currently being used to study how ILC2s contribute to human asthma and test potential therapies in preclinical studies.

"Because ILC2s are the only cells that express both ICOS and ICOS-L, our research sets the stage for designing new therapeutic approaches that target ILC2s to treat asthma," said Hadi Maazi, PhD, a research associate in Akbari's lab and the study's first author.

Other USC co-authors include Nisheel Patel, Ishwarya Sankaranarayanan, Yuzo Suzuki and Diamanda Rigas. The study was supported by the National Institutes of Health and the American Association of Immunology.

HSC Newsmakers

A roundup of news items related to Keck Medicine of USC, which may include philanthropic donations, research grants, publication in academic journals and mentions in the news media:

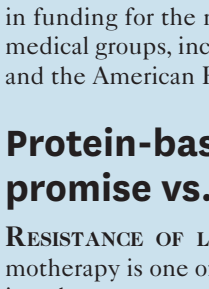
Courtesy EASA

Peti-Peterdi is inducted into prestigious honor societies

Pioneering Keck Medicine of USC scientist Janos Peti-Peterdi, received congratulations in early March in Salzburg, Austria, from Austrian President Heinz Fischer upon his induction into the European Academy of Sciences and Arts. The group of more than 1,700 scientists, researchers, artists and philosophers from across the globe focuses on furthering ethical and scientific values. The Hungary native has also been elected into the American Society for Clinic Investigation, an honor society of physicians and scientists. His induction will be April 24 in Chicago. Peti-Peterdi's selection by the two prestigious groups reflects the international recognition of his laboratory's pioneering work and cutting-edge research on kidney disease. Peti-Peterdi and his lab have received $5 million in funding for the next five years for research from various medical groups, including the National Institutes of Health and the American Heart Association. **— Douglas Morino**

Protein-based therapy shows promise vs. resistant leukemia

Resistance of leukemia cells to contemporary chemotherapy is one of the most formidable obstacles to treating the most common form of childhood cancer, known as acute lymphoblastic leukemia (ALL). Now researchers at Children's Hospital Los Angeles (CHLA) and USC have designed and developed a new protein-based therapy they believe will prove highly effective against drug-resistant leukemia cells. The new approach may also amplify the potency of treatment options such as chemotherapy and radiation therapy. The work, published online Jan. 26 by the *Journal of Clinical Investigation*, demonstrated the effectiveness of the new fusion protein in mouse models using leukemia cells taken directly from patients with ALL, which represents about 25 percent of cancer diagnoses among those age 15. The cancer once had a very high mortality rate, but today almost 80 percent of children affected by ALL achieve long-term survival. "That's great news, unless your child is one of the 20 percent," said the study's principal investigator, Fatih M. Uckun of the Children's Center for Cancer and Blood Disease at CHLA and USC Norris Comprehensive Cancer Center. "Despite advances in available therapies, unmet and urgent needs remain in the fight against leukemia. We still have children with disease that our drugs can't help enough. And for patients who relapse, their chances of long-term survival are less than 20 percent. We've got to do better." **— Debra Kain**



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Les Dunseith

Doctors talk to Norris supporters

Stephen B. Gruber, director of USC Norris Comprehensive Cancer Center, hosted the USC Norris Ambassadors Friends and Family Luncheon on March 12. Also speaking were two other doctors: Art Ulene, at right above, a longtime broadcast media medical expert, and Stuart Siegel, founder and co-director of the USC Norris Adolescent and Young Adult (AYA) Program. The luncheon was attended by USC Norris Ambassadors and USC Associates, who promote and share the cancer center's mission. Siegel discussed how AYA@USC Norris aims to improve youth survival rates through research, clinical trials, specialized support services and educational initiatives.

Les Dunseith

T.C. Scotton and Harut Hovsepyan hug in celebration of their matches. Both will stay in Southern California.

MATCH DAY: It's envelope time

Continued from page 1

Neuroscience. He plans to become an advocate for psychiatric patients.

"I'm going back home," shouted Susana Torres, originally from the Bay Area, about her first-choice match with UC Davis Medical Center.

"These are tears of joy," sighed Shuhan He, who was relieved that this day had finally arrived and that he matched with his first choice, Harvard Neurology Residency Program.

The morning's speakers included 2015 class co-president Reem Itani, as well as Donna Elliott, MD, EdD, senior associate dean for student affairs, and Henri Ford, MD, MHA, vice dean of medical education. Also, the dean of the Keck School of Medicine, Carmen A. Puliafito, MD, MBA, gave a champagne toast for the students via Skype from a conference he was attending in Miami: "I'd like to propose a toast to the finest class in the history of the Keck School of Medicine, the class of 2015."

Elliott stated that every student in the class matched to a residency program for the first time in the history of the Keck School. She said 113 students will complete all or part of their training in California, with 38 at LAC+USC Medical Center. Sixty-four students will leave California for at least some of their training; in all, 22 other states and the District of Columbia were represented in the results, with New York again having the highest number of Keck School students, followed closely this year by Texas.

Regarding specialties, internal medicine had the largest number of resident matches with 29 students, followed by family medicine at 14, OB/GYN at 13, pediatrics at 12, and emergency medicine at 11. Radiology, general surgery and orthopaedic surgery all matched with 10 students; anesthesiology and Med-Peds each matched with nine.

Several Keck School students not only have goals to be excellent physicians, they want to change the face of health care.

"I don't just want to be a doctor. I want to change the game," said Miriam Lassiter, who matched with her first choice, a combined family medicine-emergency medicine program with the Christiana Care Health System, located in Wilmington, DE. "I want to move social medicine forward and be a pioneer in this new healthcare system."

Los Angeles local Harut Hovsepyan spent a year at the White House as an intern assisting with the implementation of the Affordable Care Act. "My first goal is to be a good doctor and know emergency medicine really well, but I also want to work in health policy and health and human services," said Hovesepyan, who was matched with Loma Linda University Medical Center for emergency medicine. "Emergency physicians are problem solvers and when I treat a patient, I will deal with their social issues along with their medical care. I want to make a real difference in underserved communities."

It's the personal stories that make Match Day so special.

Walking hand-in-hand, Phil Wu guided Lynn Ngai toward a tree in the quad to find a shady spot to open their envelopes together.

They made eye contact and swapped excited smiles. Ngai leaned in close for a good luck kiss. Then, simultaneously, they opened their envelopes.

Shrieking with joy, they threw their arms in the air and embraced each other in celebration.

"We are ecstatic! Our No. 1 priority was to be together, but to also get our first choice. We are so happy," said Ngai, who will train in anesthesiology at Stanford University-affiliated Santa Clara Valley Medical Center.

Ngai said she met Wu on the first day of medical school. "He helped me move in $3^{1/2}$ ago. Now, we are getting married in two months," she said with a broad smile.

Wu, who will train in radiology at the same location, was excited about starting a new chapter of their lives together with Ngai in the Bay Area.

"To be matched together and both at our No. 1 place is really exciting," he said. "Now we will be moving in together, and we will be helping each other out.

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