

NEWSWORTHY

Suggestions for story ideas are always welcome. Stories can be about research, curriculum or programs of study, unique or interesting personal achievements, growing trends or patient care with an academic angle.

Please email your comments and inquiries to [lori\\_perrault@nymc.edu](mailto:lori_perrault@nymc.edu).

You can read current and archived issues of *InTouch* by visiting us on the web: [www.nymc.edu/OfficesAndServices/PublicRelations/Publications/Intouch.html](http://www.nymc.edu/OfficesAndServices/PublicRelations/Publications/Intouch.html)

inTOUCH

New York Medical College  
Office of Public Relations

Tel: (914) 594-4536, Fax: (914) 594-4541  
Donna E. Moriarty, M.P.H. '04

Associate Vice President, Communications

Lori-Ann Perrault, Public Information Editor

Kevin R. Cummings, M.P.S., M.P.H. '00,  
Director of Web Communications

Contributor: Kimberly Gaudin de Gonzalez

*InTouch* is published ten times a year by the Office of Public Relations at New York Medical College. It is distributed to the College community, including students, faculty, staff, affiliated hospital sites and the Board of Trustees, among others. It has a circulation of 4,000.

School of Health Sciences and Practice hosts second annual health care leaders symposium

Speaking on health policy matters from a global perspective, Andrea Fischer, former German Health Minister, addressed a capacity audience in the Center for Interactive Learning in the School of Health Sciences and Practice (SHSP) on October 23. Ms. Fischer's visit was sponsored by the doctoral program in the Department of Health Policy and Management as part of its health care leaders symposium series.

An expert in the field of health economics and the welfare state, Ms. Fischer was Germany's Federal Minister of Health from 1998 to 2002, when she resigned during the Mad Cow Disease controversy. She also served as a member of the German Parliament's Green Party from 1994 to 2002, and worked as a scientist at the Berlin Science Centre and as a freelance journalist.

Ms. Fischer's presentation described the German health care system, its struggles and

accomplishments, and compared it to current health care reform efforts in the United States. **Ms. Fischer** (second from left) was welcomed by **Peter Arno, Ph.D.**, professor and director of doctoral studies; **Annette Choolfaian, R.N., M.P.A.**, professor and chair of the Department of Health Policy and Management; **Deborah Viola, M.B.A., Ph.D.**, associate professor and faculty advisor, doctoral internships; and **James J. O'Brien, Ph.D.**, SHSP vice dean. ▲



December 2009/January 2010

inTOUCH



New York Medical College  
Office of Public Relations  
Administration Building  
Valhalla, New York 10595



# inTOUCH

Volume Fifteen | Number Ten  
December 2009/January 2010

EDUCATION ► RESEARCH ► SERVICE

## Sesquicentennial Celebration recalls tradition of excellence



Karl P. Adler, M.D., left, president and chief executive officer, and Robert W. Amler, M.D., dean of the School of Health Sciences and Practice and vice president for government affairs, proudly displayed the legislative resolution presented to the College by New York State Senator Andrea Stewart-Cousins.



Accepting recognition on behalf of the students in their respective schools were from left: Obiageli Nwankwo, School of Health Sciences and Practice; Candace N. Ford, M.S. '09, Graduate School of Basic Medical Sciences; and Stephen R. Rotman, School of Medicine.

### HIGHLIGHTS

**2** Montgomery B. Douglas, M.D., is appointed to additional post



**4** College community celebrates special Academic Convocation



**5** Department of Environmental Health Science is making the most of its own wet lab



**7** Sonia Velez, M.D., J.D., encourages minority youngsters to "Dare to be a Doctor"



The deans were in good company on the evening of the Sesquicentennial Dinner Celebration. From left: Ralph A. O'Connell, M.D., provost and dean of the School of Medicine, and his wife Jane; Francis L. Belloni, Ph.D., dean of the Graduate School of Basic Medical Sciences, and his wife Maggie Ciarcia; and Dr. Amler and his wife Sherlita Amler, M.D., Putnam County Health Commissioner and member of the College faculty.

**A**n aura of appreciation and respect emanated from the audience as New York Medical College's 150 years of history flashed before their eyes at the Sesquicentennial Celebration Dinner. The gala, which was held at the Glen Island Harbour Club in New Rochelle, N.Y. on October 17, raised approximately \$400,000 to benefit programs and activities of the university.

The group of 400 partygoers realized they shared in the credit of the College's successes as they joined together to celebrate the College's rich history and viewed a video presentation of the College's story from its inception as the early vision of forward thinkers to the groundbreaking discoveries of

researchers, with an unwavering commitment to the underserved and to excellence in education.

"Although New York Medical College's name, location, and institutional affiliations have evolved over the years, the cornerstones upon which it stands today remain unchanged since its founding 150 years ago," Karl P. Adler, M.D., the 25th president and chief executive officer of the College, told the guests. "Those cornerstones are excellence in health sciences education, dedication to patient-centered care, innovations in research, and service to the greater community—or as the College's 1864 Prospectus put it, 'The broad and elevated platform of an enlightened and progressive medical science.'"

continued on page 7



## Appointments & Promotions

### GRADUATE SCHOOL OF BASIC MEDICAL SCIENCES

#### Appointment:

Sulli J. Popilskis, D.V.M.

*Assistant Professor of Anesthesiology*

*Assistant Professor of Physiology*

*(secondary)*

### SCHOOL OF HEALTH SCIENCES AND PRACTICE

#### Appointments:

John Maltby, M.S.

*Assistant Professor of Public Health Practice*

Ann Lisa Katz, M.S.W.

*Assistant Professor of Public Health Practice*

#### Promotion:

Denton Brosius, Ph.D.

*Associate Professor of Public Health Practice*

## Montgomery B. Douglas, M.D., is appointed associate dean for diversity and inclusion



Montgomery B. Douglas, M.D., has been appointed to a new position as associate dean for diversity and inclusion.

**M**ontgomery B. Douglas, M.D., chairman of the Department of Family and Community Medicine, has been appointed associate dean for diversity and inclusion, a newly created position reflecting the College's commitment to diversity among its students and faculty. According to the College's 2009-2014 five-year strategic plan, the new role is important to help the university to fulfill its "mission of educating outstanding health care professionals for the multicultural world of the 21st century," and addresses a point of improvement outlined in the College's most recent Liaison Committee on Medical Education (LCME) review.

Dr. Douglas will lead a university-wide initiative to increase faculty diversity and enrollment of traditionally underrepresented minority students that include blacks, Hispanics, Pacific Islanders and Native Americans. Although minority enrollment in the School of Medicine has increased to ten percent in the past two years, Dr. Douglas said he would like to see a College goal of 15 percent. In his new role he will work closely with the offices of Admissions, Student Financial Planning and Minority Affairs.

In conjunction with his new appointment, Dr. Douglas will also serve as the College representative to the Association of American Medical School's (AAMC) Group on Diversity and Inclusion (GDI), a national forum to support efforts to realize the benefits of diversity and inclusion in medicine and biomedical sciences. Through various programs and initiatives, GDI addresses the issues related to individuals and groups historically underrepresented in medicine. The ultimate goal is to provide quality care to all segments of the population and eliminate healthcare disparities.

Dr. Douglas has been a member of the faculty since 2001 and currently holds the title associate professor of clinical family and community medicine. He has been chair of the department since 2006. He received his medical degree from Cornell University Medical College and completed his residency in family medicine at the University of Rochester. ▲

## Fern R. Juster, M.D., is promoted to senior associate dean for admissions

**A**fter serving nearly 15 years as associate dean for admissions, with responsibilities for directing the Office of Admissions, reviewing thousands of applications and seating classes of high-caliber, well-rounded medical students, Fern R. Juster, M.D., has been promoted to senior associate dean for admissions.

Dr. Juster, who is also associate professor of clinical pediatrics, joined the faculty in 1986. She has served as chair of the Committee on Admissions since 1995. Prior to her administrative appointment, she was chief of the College's Division of General Pediatrics. Dr. Juster continues to see patients today, many with special needs and chronic diseases. In addition to her administrative responsibilities, she is active in many medical student educational activities, including serving as director for all sites of the pediatric chronic care selective, and as faculty advisor for fourth-year medical students.

Dr. Juster received her M.D. degree from the State University of New York Stony Brook School of Medicine. She completed a pediatric internship and residency at Albert Einstein/Montefiore Medical Center and a general pediatrics fellowship at Schneider Children's Hospital on Long Island.

She is a member of the board of directors of the Westchester Institute for Human Development (WIHD) and a member of the advisory board of WIHD's Family Connection, a resource center that serves families of children with disabilities. She is called upon as an expert witness in child abuse cases for the Westchester County District Attorney's Office. In 2006 she was named a faculty initiate to Alpha Omega Alpha, the national honor medical society. ▲



Fern R. Juster, M.D., senior associate dean for admissions, is in the thick of screening and selecting applicants for the Class of 2014.

## Pravin B. Sehgal, M.D., Ph.D., receives Dean's Research Award

An expert in the world of cellular communications, Pravin B. Sehgal, M.D., Ph.D., professor of cell biology and anatomy and of medicine, has made an internationally-recognized career out of researching how and why cellular messages misfire—what he calls “defects in signaling and trafficking.” Those misfires appear to be involved in some very grave diseases—cancer and pulmonary hypertension are two that Dr. Sehgal's work has impacted.

On January 21, 2010, Dr. Sehgal, will receive the 2009 Dean's Research Award. The ceremony will take place at 4 p.m. in Nevins Auditorium in the Medical Education Center. Dr. Sehgal will give a lecture on “Four graduate student stories: paradigm shifts in STAT3 signaling and pulmonary hypertension.”

For more than 40 years, Dr. Sehgal has had his eye on one group of envoys in particular—cytokines. These are the soluble messengers that immune cells produce to either attack an invading organism or to talk to other types of immune cells. He's tracked them for years, along with other signaling mechanisms, watching carefully how they control transcytoplasmic trafficking inside the cell.

And he's shown that when there's a disturbance in the intracellular trafficking of regulatory proteins, it can lead to pulmonary hypertension, a mystifying fatal disease that involves blockage of the pulmonary arterial tree and eventually heart failure, predominantly in young women. Dr. Sehgal's lecture will revisit the scientific view of STAT3 signaling developed in the early 1990s, and shed light on some of the shifts in that original paradigm. STAT3 stands for signal transducer and activator of transcription 3 and mediates both the expression and response to cytokines that cause inflammation. Today activated STAT3 is recognized to be a nodal point connecting chronic inflammation with the causation of cancer.

One of the cytokines that activates STAT3 is interleukin 6, a molecule produced by white blood cells when an injury occurs, causing the injured area to swell up. In 1980, Dr. Sehgal was among the first researchers to study interleukin 6, (IL-6). IL-6 is produced in the body at sites of inflammation as well as cancer and then travels



Pravin B. Sehgal, M.D., Ph.D., professor of cell biology and anatomy and of medicine, joins the ranks of 17 other College faculty members who have been honored with the Dean's Research Award.

via the blood stream to the liver to elicit an increase in the synthesis of protective proteins by the liver such as C-reactive proteins (CRP), various clotting factors and complement factors, primarily through activation of the transcription factor STAT3. Moreover, IL-6 also enhances the activity of protective white blood cells and increases antibody production. These effects of IL-6 help the body to recover from infection and injury.

Dr. Sehgal's lab has documented that IL-6 occurs in human tumors and can increase the spontaneous movement of breast cancer cells. He has also shown that IL-6 is involved in signaling in liver cancer cells and regulating expression of several protective plasma protein genes through STAT3. Finally, Dr. Sehgal has shown a relation between hyperactive STAT3, and an occurrence called a Golgi blockade, which appears to be on the cellular pathway contributing to pulmonary hypertension.

Dr. Sehgal received his M.D. from the University of Bombay in India and his Ph.D. in cell biology and virology from Rockefeller University in New York. He completed a fellowship and served on the faculty there before joining the College in 1991. Author and co-author of more than 200 publications, Dr. Sehgal is also the senior editor of a book *Signal Transducers and Activation of Transcription (STATs): Biology and Activation*, published in 2003, and two previous books on IL-6 that were published by the New York Academy of Sciences in 1989 and 1995. In addition to his research activities, Dr. Sehgal is one of the faculty involved in teaching the gross anatomy course to first-year medical students. ▲

## Accolades

- *Harit Desai, M.D.*, a third-year resident in the internal medicine program at Westchester Medical Center, was one of five poster winners for outstanding original research at the Annual Scientific Meeting of the American College of Chest Physicians held in San Diego in November. He presented “Statins Reduce Appropriate Cardioverter-Defibrillator Shocks and Mortality in Patients with Heart Failure and Combined Cardiac Resynchronization Therapy and Cardioverter Defibrillators.” Sixteen other presentations, 4 oral and 12 poster, were also given by residents in the same program.

- Many members of the faculty and administration attended the Association of American Medical College's annual meeting held in Boston in November. A Group on Educational Affairs (GEA) and Group on Student Affairs (GSA) mini-workshop session, “Can Old Dogs Learn New Tricks? The Millennium Generation,” was organized by *Jennifer Koestler, M.D.*, associate dean for medical education, and presented by *Martha S. Grayson, M.D.*, former vice dean of medical education, *Ingrid M. Allard, M.D., M.S.Ed.*, assistant professor of pediatrics and of family and community medicine, and fourth-year medical student *Ariadne Avellino, M.P.H. '09*. Another GEA/GSA mini-workshop session, “The Lost Year: Building a Fourth-Year Curriculum for Transition to Internship,” was presented by Dr. Koestler and others. A poster presentation, “Trends in Residents' Career Paths by New York AOA Graduates Over a 20 year Period,” was given by Dr. Grayson, *Patricia Patrick, M.P.H. '03*, a doctoral candidate in the School of Health Sciences and Practice, and others.

- *Gary M. Williams, M.D.*, professor of pathology, was an invited breakout group leader at the recent “Workshop on Using Mode of Action Information to Improve Regulatory Decision Making,” held in London in November. The workshop was organized by the European Centre for Ecotoxicology and Toxicology of Chemicals (ECETOC).

# College community celebrates special Academic Convocation

At colleges and universities across the nation, the occasion of Academic Convocation usually celebrates the start of a new academic year. This year the New York Medical College Sesquicentennial Academic Convocation celebrated much more by acknowledging 150 years of rich history and accomplishments and the achievements of more than 100 faculty and staff honorees who received appointments and promotions during the past year.

The national anthem, sung by the Arrhythmias, a student a cappella group, got things underway on November 12 in Nevins Auditorium in the Medical Education Center. The ceremony was led by Paul K. Woolf, M.D., associate professor of pediatrics, who served as the grand marshal. Karl P. Adler, M.D., president and chief executive officer, and Ralph A. O'Connell, M.D., provost and dean of the School of Medicine, were joined by department chairmen to congratulate the honorees, among them professors emeriti, endowed professors, newly appointed chairmen, administrative appointees and newly appointed course and clerkship directors.

This year's convocation address was given by keynote speaker William H. Frishman, M.D., the Barbara and William Rosenthal professor and chairman of the Department of Medicine, who presented "150 Years of Excellence and Innovation: The Story of New York Medical College." The audience was riveted by the little-known historical tidbits he tossed out and

amused by the decades-old photos of faculty, some of whom were present—and equally amused.

A special Distinguished Service Award was presented by Norman Levine, Ph.D., president of the faculty senate, to Martha S. Grayson, M.D., former vice dean for medical education, for her more than 25 years of service to the College. ▲



Faculty took a moment to congratulate William H. Frishman, M.D., right, the Barbara and William Rosenthal Professor and Chairman of the Department of Medicine, who was this year's keynote speaker. From left: Zvi Lefkowitz, M.D., professor of clinical radiology and chairman of the Department of Radiology, who was an honoree himself; Renee Garrick, M.D., vice dean for Westchester Medical Center and professor of clinical medicine; and David E. Asprinio, M.D., associate professor of clinical orthopedic surgery and chairman of the Department of Orthopedic Surgery.



Leonard J. Newman, M.D. '70, professor and chairman of the Department of Pediatrics, was on hand to congratulate Mary-Joan Marron-Corwin, M.D., for her promotion to professor of clinical pediatrics.



Joseph B. Walsh, M.D., professor and chairman of the Department of Ophthalmology, posed with honoree Jeanne Rosenthal, M.D., clinical professor of ophthalmology.



James J. O'Brien, Ph.D., right, vice dean of the School of Health Sciences and Practice, offered a hearty handshake to Robert E. Madden, M.D., professor emeritus of surgery.

## Public health program receives maximum accreditation

The School of Health Sciences and Practice (SHSP) has good news: its public health program has received accreditation from the Council on Education for Public Health (CEPH), an independent agency recognized by the U.S. Department of Education to accredit schools and programs of public health. More good news: the accreditation is for five years, the maximum allowable term, and will extend to December 31, 2014.

The accreditation is the culmination of a multi-disciplinary effort put forth by faculty, administration, students, affiliates and institutional partners. Their preparation included voluminous applications and reports, a rigorous external peer review and self-evaluation, and a two-day site visit by CEPH representatives. CEPH's accreditation criteria require meticulous details from the institution regarding mission and goals,

organizational setting, governance, resources, instructional programs, research, service, faculty, students, and evaluation and planning. Originally pre-accredited as the School of Public Health, the School of Health Sciences and Practice made significant changes in its organization and academic offerings, to better fulfill its mission and meet the needs of prospective students. The new academic structure resembled a public-health program model more closely than a school model, so the administration requested accreditation as a program.

"Accreditation of our public health programs was a natural outcome of our strategy and naturally fit our new academic organization," said Robert W. Amler, M.D., dean of the SHSP and vice president for government affairs. "CEPH accreditation strengthens our mission of education, research and service and it validates our educational

leadership in public health. It also assures our students of a quality education and a degree that reflects a clear level of competence for success in public health and related fields."

According to Dr. Amler, the CEPH final report strongly praised the school and its programs, highlighting its extensive community outreach and services by students and faculty.

The SHSP now comprises three fully accredited programs, each approved by their respective agencies: speech-language pathology by the American Speech-Language Hearing Association (ASHA); physical therapy by Commission on Accreditation in Physical Therapy Education (CAPTE); and the public health programs—which include behavioral sciences and health promotion, epidemiology, environmental health science and health policy and management—by CEPH. ▲

# Department of Environmental Health Science is making the most of its own wet lab

Recognizing that environmental exposures contribute to the development of many human illnesses, the School of Health Sciences and Practice has established its first wet lab to help researchers and students understand the biochemical events underlying the harmful effects of environmental contaminants.

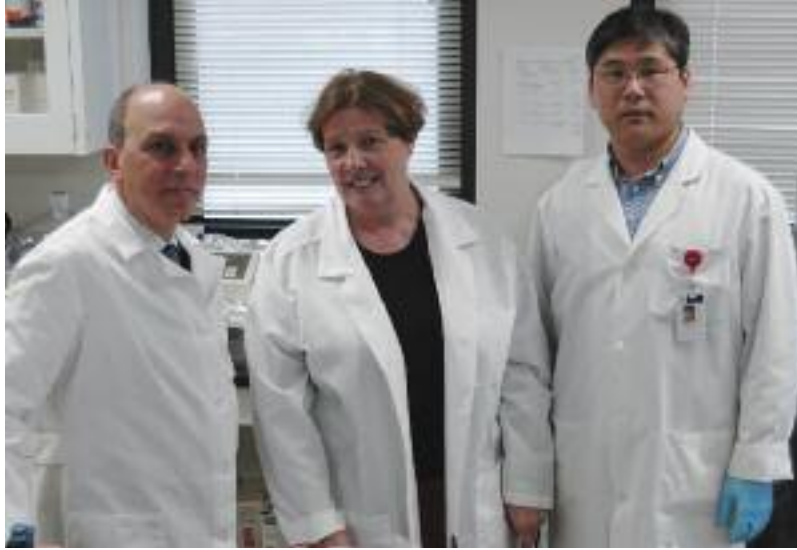
It is one of the few labs in the public health arena that conducts basic science research in addition to applied science or population studies. Wet laboratories are laboratories where the testing and analysis of chemicals, drugs, or other material or biological matter requires water, direct ventilation, and specialized utilities. The lab is located on the first floor of the Vosburgh Pavilion.

“Comprehending the underlying events in environmental health science is imperative to understanding the disease processes and devising interventions that can be effective in protecting and or restoring the health of individuals,” said Diane E. Heck, Ph.D., professor and chair of the Department of Environmental Health Science.

“It is both rewarding and exciting to see M.P.H. students, who often appear with minimal training in basic research, learn the rudiments of bench science and eventually join us in the lab,” said Dr. Heck.

Taking epidemiology to a new level, students are tackling everyday consumer concerns, such as what type of chemicals might be leached into food from containers. Much of their work is taken right from news headlines. Dr. Heck explained that while the popular press condemns many chemicals and consumer products, these claims are sometimes unfounded, unsubstantiated or the science behind them poorly understood.

“Unfortunately much of the detective work involved in identifying the real chemical culprits, scientifically evaluating the claims, and devising



Members of the Department of Environmental Health Science are taking advantage of their new lab. From left: Michael P. Shakarjian, Ph.D., assistant professor; Diane E. Heck, Ph.D., professor and chair; and Hong Duck Kim, Ph.D., assistant professor.

interventions remains undone,” she said. “Here at the School of Health Sciences and Practice and the Institute of Public Health, faculty and students are busy tackling these problems.”

Several of the studies ongoing in labs at the School of Health Sciences and Practices deal with convenient, ubiquitous plastic. Hong Duck Kim, Ph.D., assistant professor, is studying the effects of bisphenol A (BPA.) BPA and BPA dimethacrylate are used in polycarbonate plastic and polystyrene resins and as dental sealants. BPA and its derivatives have been found in foods stored and or processed in plastic containers, in infant formula from plastic bottles, and in the saliva of patients treated with dental sealants.

“Little is known about the biochemical events elicited by the exposure of cells and tissues to BPA,” said Dr. Heck. “Dr. Kim and his students have determined that, after exposure to BPA, there are dramatic changes in glucose and lipid metabolism, expression of pro-inflammatory mediators and even cell viability. Even more striking is their finding that differential responses are elicited by BPA from human kidney cells in the presence and absence of sugar, and that BPA in the presence of high levels of glucose can even cause cell death.” This latter finding may be important in diabetic kidney disease. BPA has been shown to interfere with reproductive

development in animals, and has been linked to cardiovascular disease and diabetes in humans, among other things.

In related studies, Anna Vetrano, Ph.D., assistant professor of environmental health science, is studying the role of phthalates, chemical plasticizers released from medical tubing, in the suppression of immune responses in neonates. Working with Barry Weinberger, M.D., chief of neonatology at UMDNJ Robert Wood Johnson Medical School, Dr. Vetrano and her team have determined that the phthalates leached from some tubing can profoundly interfere with the ability of neonatal immune cells to mount proper inflammatory responses, making them more susceptible to inflammatory diseases such as bronchopulmonary dysplasia and necrotizing enterocolitis.

But research in the department of environmental health science lab is not limited to the effects of plastics in the environment. The increased risk of a terrorist attack in the United States involving chemical and radiological agents presents numerous challenges. Dr. Heck and Michael Shakarjian, Ph.D., assistant professor of medicine at UMDNJ, are conducting studies on the mechanisms mediating the effects of vesicants such as mustard gas to develop novel approaches for treating injuries resulting from intentional chemical and radiological exposures.

“We are focused on development of new and improved medical countermeasures for the prevention and treatment of the conditions caused by potential and existing chemical agents of terrorism,” Dr. Heck said. “Addressing problems potentially caused by these agents is particularly critical because many of the same agents that pose threats as terrorist agents may also be released from transportation and storage facilities by industrial accidents or during a natural disaster.”

Dr. Heck believes that the ongoing studies in the new wet lab offer students extraordinary opportunities to research the triggers of many significant illnesses affecting today’s populations. ▲

## Department of Surgery hosts Eighth Annual Louis R.M. DelGuercio Surgical Lectureship and Research Day

A day of moderated poster rounds and scientific paper presentations, capped by a keynote address by a successful researcher and surgeon, highlighted the knowledge and talent of members of the Department of Surgery. It also served to honor a distinguished and respected member of the department for 25 years, **Louis R. M. Del Guercio, M.D.** (center of photo at right), professor emeritus of surgery.

The Eighth Annual Louis R.M. DelGuercio Surgical Lectureship and Research Day, held on November 4 in the Medical Education Center, featured abstracts in surgical basic science,

clinical surgery and surgical education and were presented by students, residents and alumni of the Department of Surgery’s program affiliates.

The keynote address was given by **Marc K. Wallack, M.D.**, right, professor of surgery, vice chairman of the Department of Surgery, and chief of surgery at Metropolitan Hospital Center, who presented “The Development of a Second Generation Melanoma Vaccine.” Dr. Wallack served as the principal investigator of the first randomized double-blind multi-institutional FDA-approved melanoma vaccine trial in the world developed and funded by the National Cancer Institute from 1989 to 1995.



**John A. Savino, M.D.**, left, professor and the Felicien M. Steichen, M.D., Chairman of the Department of Surgery, used the occasion to recognize Dr. Del Guercio’s 80th birthday by presenting him with a scrapbook of letters and photos from former residents, many of whom were in the audience. ▲

## College observes International Education Week

A flurry of activity on campus accompanied the commemoration of International Education Week, November 16-20. The International Student and Scholar Association hosted a bake sale and holiday craft sale to raise money for HandCrafting Justice, a fair trade partnership working with artisan women struggling for economic justice and independence in developing countries.

The following day the Student National Medical Association and Boricua Latino Health Organization joined forces to host an international food fair, filling the Basic Sciences Building Lobby with aromas of dishes from Brazil, India and Taiwan, to name a few of the countries represented. A showing of the movie *Hotel Rwanda* was sponsored by the Genocide Awareness and Prevention Club (GAAP) and raised money for UNICEF.

A highlight of the week was the annual Culture Show, hosted by the Asian Pacific American Student Association and South Asian Medicine Student Association. A talent show called "2009 NYMC's Got Talent" was attended by more than 300 students, faculty members and their families. The evening featured a buffet dinner featuring Indian, Thai and Chinese cuisine. Later student performances showcased a variety of cultural entertainment, including Bhangra, hip-hop, Bollywood, Latin, jazz, contemporary and other forms of music and dance.

International Education Week is celebrated around the world to acknowledge the benefits of international education and exchange worldwide. It is a joint initiative of the U.S. Department of State and the U.S. Department of Education to promote programs that prepare Americans for a global environment and to



The culture show moved outside so the crowd could enjoy the fire juggling talent of second-year medical student John Manning.

attract future leaders from abroad to study, learn, and exchange experiences in the United States. ▲

## Department of Microbiology and Immunology hosts research forum



The conference room in the Department of Microbiology and Immunology was filled to capacity when ten students presented their research projects in progress at the department's graduate student research forum held on November 24. An audience of their peers and faculty members joined a panel of three judges who challenged the presenters with detailed questions and observations while providing valuable feedback for improving presentation skills and research techniques.

The forum was sponsored by **Abraham Mittelman, M.D.**, seated center, clinical associate professor of medicine, who also

served as a judge. The remaining judges, seated from left, were **Debabrata Banerjee, Ph.D.**, associate professor of medicine and pharmacology at UMDNJ Robert Wood Johnson Medical School, and **Jose Galarza, D.V.M., Ph.D.**, president of Techno Vax, Inc., a biotechnology company that specializes in vaccine development. Both are also adjunct associate professors of microbiology and immunology at the College.

Flanked by **Raj Tiwari, Ph.D.**, far left, professor and graduate program director of microbiology and immunology, and **Ira Schwartz, Ph.D.**, far right, professor and chairman of the Department of Microbiology and Immunology, the presenters were from left:

### **Sini Skariah**

*Evaluating the Role of FIKK Kinases in Toxoplasma Gondii Persistence in Macrophages*

### **Christopher Pappas, M.S. '06**

*Glycerol Utilization by Borrelia burgdorferi is Essential During the Tick Phase of the Spirochete Lifecycle*

### **Sukalyani Banik**

*BB0844, an rpoS Regulated Gene, is Dispensable for Borrelia burgdorferi Pathogenicity and Maintenance in the Mouse-Tick Infectious Cycle*

### **Yu (Arthur) He**

*Monoclonal Antibodies for Development of High-Yield Reassortants for Influenza A Vaccine Production*

### **Priyanka Ganguli**

*Genotypic Comparison of Borrelia burgdorferi Clinical Isolates from Northeast and Midwest regions*

### **Shilpi Rajoria**

*In Vitro Model to Define Estradiol Mediated Metastatic Propensity of Thyroid Cells*

### **T. Scott Nowicki**

*Inhibition of uPAR and uPA Reduces Invasion and Degradative Potential in Papillary Thyroid Carcinoma Cells*

### **Jennifer Arroyo**

*Influenza Virus Infection: Are Paraspeckles Involved?*

### **Michelle Krupna**

*Borrelia burgdorferi Induces a Type I IFN Response in Human Peripheral Blood Mononuclear Cells that is Dependent on the Presence of a Specific Linear Plasmid*

### **Andrea George**

*An Experimental Model to Define Stem Cell Induced Neovasclogenesis in Breast Cancer Development* ▲

# Sonia Velez, M.D., J.D., encourages minority youngsters to “Dare to be a Doctor”

When Sonia Velez, M.D., J.D., assistant professor of family and community medicine, was 11 years old, her mother took her to a pediatrician complaining of nausea, a low grade fever and a dull pain in her belly that was becoming sharper on the right side.

Sonia’s mother, a Hispanic immigrant with a sixth-grade education and limited English, was sent home with instructions on how to care for the stomach flu. Soon after, young Sonia’s pain became unbearable and she was taken to the hospital and diagnosed with a ruptured appendix. After the appendectomy, she was hospitalized for a month to recover from peritonitis.

Sonia recalls how the surgeon, who performed the appendectomy, loudly berated and scolded her mother for not taking the child sooner to the doctor. Sonia spoke up and told him that her mother had indeed taken her to the doctor and had been sent home.

“It was a life-changing moment for me,” the grown up Dr. Velez recalled. “My mother had in fact done the right thing for me, but because she was a poor uneducated immigrant in Harlem, she was mistreated.” When the surgeon realized his mistake, he was sincerely apologetic. “After that, the surgeon and the staff treated us wonderfully. What could have been a very negative experience for us turned out to be so positive and eye opening that I spent the next 12 to 16 years working hard to be part of a medical system that needed my insight.”



From left: Westchester County Legislator, Ken Jenkins, County Executive Andrew J. Spano, and Westchester County Department of Health Commissioner, Joshua Lipsman, M.D., M.P.H., joined Sonia Velez, M.D., J.D., to support and encourage minority middle and high school students in achieving their goals of becoming health professionals.

negative experience as a young child into the motivation for a successful career path should inspire our African-American and Hispanic youth to overcome any obstacles as they pursue their dreams and consider a career in medicine.”

Dr. Velez has been a faculty member at St. Joseph’s Medical Center Family Practice in Yonkers, N.Y., since 1997. A graduate of Fordham University, she attended medical school at the American University of the Caribbean. She went on to obtain her law degree at Boston University School of Law before completing her residency training at St. Joseph’s, where she was chief resident in her final year.

She told the students that in order to succeed, they must master their ABC’s: “A for Achieve, B for Belief in yourself, and C for the I Can spirit that will help you overcome challenges and commit to medicine.”

“Looking out into the audience took me back to when I was their age—I would have never imagined seeing that a minority female, not to mention a Hispanic female, could become a doctor,” said Dr. Velez. “It was so inspiring to see how far we’ve come, that now these kids feel capable and believe it is possible for them to pursue a career in medicine.” ▲

## Sesquicentennial Celebration Dinner

*continued from page 1*

During the evening, citations were awarded to former and current members of the College community—the event’s “honorees.” Accepting the citations on behalf of the various constituencies of the community were:

- Ronald F. Poe, chairman of the Board of Trustees, for trustees
- Norman Levine, Ph.D., president of the faculty senate, for faculty
- Catharine Crea, associate dean of research administration, for staff
- Eileen M. Dieck, M.D., ’86, president of the alumni association, on behalf of all alumni
- Stephen R. Rotman, Class of 2010 and president of the Student Senate, for students in the School of Medicine
- Candace N. Ford, M.S. ’09, Ph.D. candidate and president of the Graduate Student Association, for students of the Graduate School of Basic Medical Sciences
- Obiageli Nwankwo, M.P.H. candidate and co-president of the Student Healthcare Executives Club, for students in the School of Health Sciences and Practice

- Matthew Harris, M.D., orthopedic surgery resident, for the house staff.

“There was a sense in the room that we were all connected, and it was a truly warm and welcoming celebration,” said Julie Kubaska, M.S., vice president of development and alumni relations. “I’m so glad we took the time to acknowledge the hard work of people whose efforts have led to our successes.”

Calling the celebration “a night to truly celebrate the excellence of our past and to look forward to the university’s bright future,” Dr. Adler unveiled a five-year strategic plan. Among the goals outlined in the plan:

- New York Medical College will continue to review and reform its teaching methods to ensure students are prepared for the healthcare environment of the 21st century. It will provide innovations in curricula, implement the latest technological advancements, and enhance student support services to attract bright, committed, diverse scholars.
- The College will build on its accomplishments in research by encouraging an institution-wide focus on translational research. It will work to provide a state-of-the-art environment for biomedical research by renovating existing laboratory space and eventually adding new research space.
- The College will be a leader on health-related issues in the Hudson Valley region and beyond, and will provide education and service to the surrounding community.

Among the guests who came to honor the College’s past, present and future were New York State Senators Suzi Oppenheimer and Andrea Stewart-Cousins, as well as Westchester County Executive Andrew Spano and New York State Assemblywoman Amy Paulin.

Mr. Spano and Ms. Stewart-Cousins both presented the College with proclamations, and letters of congratulation were sent by many politicians, including Governor David A. Paterson and United States Senator Charles E. Schumer.

Governor Paterson noted the College’s significant contributions as “a prominent academic center which has earned global distinction for its top-rated faculty, progressive curriculum and state-of-the-art techniques.” Senator Schumer applauded the College’s rich history and many proud achievements, noting “great strides in cardiovascular disease, cancer, kidney disease and infectious disease.”

Fourth-year medical student Stephen R. Rotman was impressed by what he learned about the College at the dinner. “The Sesquicentennial Celebration was a single evening that allowed everyone involved with New York Medical College to reflect upon the previous 150 years,” he said. “It was a wonderful event that helped remind us where we have been and how we have achieved the successes that have graced our institution.” ▲