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Searching for more information about the ATP13A2 protein, Dr. Schultheis learned that *Atp13a2* is the mouse version of a recently discovered Parkinson’s gene *PARK9*. Suddenly, Dr. Schultheis and his lab were headed in a very different and unexpected direction.

“I followed the hot lead, but I knew we needed behavioral data, and I didn’t have the time or expertise.”

Schultheis’ PhD mentor Gary Shull suggested collaborating with Dr. Sheila Fleming, a new Parkinson’s researcher at the University of Cincinnati. That was major surprise #2.

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New Faculty

Dr. Erin Strome began her career in science at Miami University of Ohio where she earned her Bachelor's degree in Microbiology. Expanding her horizons from the world of prokaryotes and viruses, she pursued her Ph.D. in Cell and Molecular Biology at Baylor College of Medicine (BCM).

After rotating through labs that utilized baker’s yeast, mice and human tissue culture models, she decided on a project investigating modifier genes of cancer susceptibility utilizing the model organism *Saccharomyces cerevisiae*. Her research in Dr. Sharon Plon’s lab at BCM utilized a genetic screen to identify heterozygous mutations that impacted chromosome stability.

Finishing her graduate work, Dr. Strome again wanted to broaden her scientific repertoire and chose a Postdoctoral position with Dr. Hunt Willard in the Duke University Institute for Genome Sciences & Policy where she studied human centromeres and the DNA sequence and organization that underlies these wondrous structures.

Throughout graduate school and her postdoc, Dr. Strome participated in teaching and mentoring projects, as a Science Education Leadership Fellow program at BCM, mentoring undergraduate and graduate students at BCM and Duke, serving as the Instructor for the Human Genetics Institute of the Duke Talent Identification Program, and working as an Adjunct Faculty at Elon University. Dr. Strome looks forward to teaching many subjects at NKU, including Cell Biology, and returning to model organism studies and further investigating the roles of various genes and pathways in genome stability regulation in baker’s yeast. When not in the lab or the classroom, Dr. Strome enjoys time with her friends, husband, and her two dogs - especially when that time is not spent tracking down one or both of her dogs on their latest fence jumping escapade.

Staff News: A Double Round of Congratulations

Jen Iulg was promoted to Lab Manager with responsibility over the 3rd floor microbiology prep staff, and NKU alumna Cory Pfefferman was promoted to full-time.

Second floor lab technician and biology alumna Audra Points celebrated the birth of her first child. Kimber Leigh Points weighed 7lbs 13oz and was born July 13th.
A collaboration between the departments of Biological Sciences and Chemistry paid major dividends this summer for NKU undergraduates and could ultimately lead to safer treatments for neurological disorders.

Neuroanatomist Kristi Haik joined forces with analytical chemist Heather Bullen to win a $405,000 National Institutes of Health grant “Nanotechnology: Advancing Toxicity Testing.” Nanotechnology is an emerging field that covers everything from advanced fabric coatings to drug delivery packages capable of zooming past the blood-brain barrier. Drs. Haik and Bullen are focused on drug delivery, because scientists are now discovering that some nanoparticles can have unexpected toxic effects.

“It is vital to investigate potential toxicity issues that may arise from overexposure to nanoparticles,” said Dr. Haik. The team’s interdisciplinary approach is a powerful way to get answers quickly.

“Questions need to be answered from different perspectives, so this provides a more cohesive approach to our research,” Dr. Bullen.

The undergraduate nano-team includes Adam Got tula, Joey Squeri, Matthew Stark, Samantha Sutkamp and Alex Niemer.

Many of the students traded places throughout the summer, learning both the biology and the chemistry of nanoparticles.

“Heather and I are very good at exchanging students,” added Dr. Haik. “Alex was in my lab all summer, but also spent time in Dr. Bullen’s doing analytical chemistry. They get it all.”

They also get a glimpse of the rewards of a scientific research career. “What we are working on has the potential to help so many people,” said Alex Niemer. “If nanoparticles can be used as a delivery method, it could open the door to more treatments of neurological disease.”

And although that hasn’t happened yet, the success of this nano-collaboration is readily apparent when you talk to the undergraduate researchers involved.

“Research at NKU has a family feel to it,” said undergraduate Adam Gottula. “I always know Dr. B(ullen) and my partners in the lab will have my back if I ever need help in anything. The opportunity to me is priceless.”
Parkinson’s mouse  
(cont. from p.1)

“When I read her papers, she was at UCLA, and it turned out she came to UC. The very person whose papers I’m reading came here. Whoa! What are the odds of that?”

Drs. Schultheis and Fleming believe the \textit{Atp13a2} knockout mouse might be a good model of Kufor-Rakeb syndrome, an atypical form of Parkinson’s disease. It will take a great deal more work and data analysis to understand the new mouse model, but the project has already had a major impact on the undergraduates who are working with Dr. Schultheis.

“This experience had been invaluable,” said Amy Clippinger, a student in Dr. Schultheis’ lab and one of two recipients of the 2011 Clara Richards award. “I not only learn how to use techniques like DNA isolation and PCR, but also mouse husbandry and animal behavior.”

Clippinger also appreciates the opportunity to collaborate with the research team from UC. “Working with Dr. Fleming and her students has been a great opportunity for me...Since she is an expert on Parkinson’s disease, it has been exciting to work with her. It seems to me that this project is right on the forefront of Parkinson’s research. It’s fantastic to be a part of it.”

But for a young scientist who is already planning her own research career, Clippinger learned some other important lessons as well. “Some of the mice we tested this summer were the very first mouse pups I weaned and genotyped almost two years ago. As far as undergraduate projects go, that’s a long time to wait for results!”

“I hope those months and years of work done by all the undergraduate students working on this project will pay off...whether they do or not, I know we undergraduates have all gained valuable research experience in areas ranging from cell culture to mouse behavior.”

As for Dr. Schultheis, he has been contacted by researchers at the University of Florida and the Neurodegenerative Research Group in Barcelona, Spain about his “accidental mouse.”

“A lot of people are excited about it.” And the excitement all began because Dr. Schultheis understood the importance of asking basic questions about how our cells get the nutrients they need.

Debby Dempsey earns top NKU online teaching honors

If there was a World Series of teaching, Debby Dempsey would be there hitting home runs AND pitching no-hitters!

She’s not just good at teaching; she’s doubly good. The long-time lecturer in Anatomy & Physiology received the NKU Outstanding Non-Tenure Track Faculty Award in 2004 for her classroom teaching and was honored this year with the first Online Faculty of the Year Award.

“Debby Dempsey has always been a dedicated, thoughtful, and kind colleague and teacher,” wrote

--continued on page 5--
Did You Know?

NKU biology outreach programs served over 3600 K-12 students in the last school year!

Chair’s Message
(cont. from p.1)

It is our hope that you continue to view your time as a Bio major positively and that we were able to play a role in your life’s successes. We are very proud of our alums!

Last year we had 190 students enrolled in our fall Introductory Biology class for majors (BIO 150), this year we have every space filled to the fire code maximum. The word is out that NKU has excellent science programs and I hope that you will urge your family and neighbors to let us show them the advantages and broad array of opportunities we provide to our students.

Our Environmental Science Program, likewise, continues to grow under the new directorship of Dr. Richard Boyce. There is ever more realization of the impact humankind has had on our world and the need for research into how we can have a more positive role. Other changes include a new faculty member, Dr. Erin Strome, a cell biologist who comes to us from Duke University. We are transitioning to a very young and vibrant faculty who embrace modern technology both in the classroom and the research lab.

A continued generous donation by Dr. Robert and Dee Lorenz helps to support student presentation of their research at state and national meetings where they receive praise and awards for the high quality of work. We are grateful for the gift from the Lorenzes and for every donation made by our alums. If you are not on our bio alumni email list and would like to be, or if your address has changed, please email me at pearce@nku.edu.

This year’s national Tri-Beta meeting will be in Puerto Rico where I had the pleasure of accompanying many of you years ago. I hope you have fond memories of your research at NKU and will consider helping our new crop of students. Please do keep in touch with faculty you remember. One of the things that makes our work a vocation and not just a job is our continuing relationship with our students.

Dr. Debra Pearce in the nominating letter. “Her foremost concern is always the welfare of her students.”

Still, Dempsey said she was surprised by the honor and expressed appreciation for the support she’s received while developing her four online courses. “It has been wonderful to work with. They’ve done a marvelous job.”

Oddly enough, Dempsey said she didn’t start out as a gadget person. “I was NOT, until the time PowerPoint came along, and I saw the wave of the future and knew I’d better grab on.”

So, how does she manage to juggle everything from an I-Phone to a dual PC-MAC desktop system without crashing and burning? “I get in and fiddle-faddle till I figure it out. That’s been fun!”

While learning the technology, she’s also learned the value of online education. “This is important. Some students couldn’t do it any other way. I just had a student from Ireland in my class. I’ve had students (in the military) taking a class and suddenly they’ve been deployed.”

For those who believe online courses are easier, Dempsey is quick to warn both students and colleagues that online teaching takes commitment and time. “I’m putting in far more hours now than when I was standing in front of the classroom. I spend most of my mornings doing e-mail.”

She’s also developed electronic flash cards to help students master medical terminology and the details of A&P. But her caring, personal touch didn’t disappear into the ethernet. “I try to call all of my students on the phone in the first few weeks of the semester.”

Dempsey is the first to admit that she doesn’t have all the answers to online teaching. “What works for one class doesn’t work for another. There’s a lot of trial and error to it, but you can drop back and punt in the middle of the semester. The students appreciate that.”

So, what’s in her future? More teaching. More gadgets. More fun. “I’ve been at NKU since 1975, and I’m loving every day! It brings me such joy to be here. I’m always learning something new.”
Science On The Border:
A Challenging Adventure

Preparing for a research trip to a distant field site requires careful planning and packing, but Dr. Jon Hastings got some unusual advice about what to pack before heading to southeast Arizona to study cicada killer wasps.

“Everyone said ‘Bring a sidearm, and have it with you at all times,’” recounted Hastings who quickly added “I never did.” Hastings is currently preparing for his next field season near the US-Mexico border in an area of Arizona he called “a war zone.”

“There’s a lot of drug traffic…a lot of immigrants. Vigilantes patrol the border. It really is a war zone down there.”

Hastings and his colleagues Chuck Holliday of Lafayette College (PA) and Joe Coelho from Quincy College (IL) didn’t run into any serious trouble during their last field season, but they did find young human rights workers and many of the immigrants that the workers were trying to save from a searing desert death.

“We encountered migrants pretty often. They just wanted food and water. One said ‘Please call immigration. I’ve had enough.’ So, we did. He was in pretty bad shape.”

The rugged country makes it difficult for travel and includes plenty of natural dangers from scorpions to venomous snakes. The field site Hastings uses is an environmental preserve created around the Southwest ghost town of Ruby, AZ. The caretaker is known as Sun Dog, and the local cuisine includes mule deer steaks, Antelope jackrabbit stew, and cicada kebobs.

“It’s a very wild place, but from a biological perspective, it was a very cool place…pretty spectacular.”

Hastings and his collaborators have been working to understand a species of cicada killer wasps previously known only from museum specimens.

“Nobody had ever done a field study of this species before,” said Hastings. Despite the remote location, the researchers had no problem finding the wasps in the field.

“Good museum specimens will give you all the information you need…you go right there.”

Back at NKU, Hastings is working with Dr. Patrick Schultheis to compare the DNA of the Arizona cicada killers with other wasp species to determine their evolutionary relationships. He’s also preparing for another field season in 2012.

Despite the harsh terrain and dangers, Hastings said it’s not the worst conditions he’s ever faced. Those he found when leading a group of NKU students in the Big Bend region of Texas. “That was the worst weather ever. It was 114 every day for 10 days. We went through two gallons of water a day.”

Was it worth it? Hastings has no doubt about that. “The trips to the Southwest really changed lives. I hear from those students all the time about the impact it had on them.”
Departmental Award winner Elizabeth Shelley conducted research in the Barton laboratory on the development of decontamination protocols for bat researchers and speleologists to stop the spread of the fungal-induced White Nose Syndrome in bats. Since first reported in 2006, over one million bats have been lost in the US, representing one of the largest decreases in North American wildlife populations in living memory (since the extinction of the passenger pigeon in 1914).

Stephanie Hayes’ research in the Durtsche laboratory centered on potential agents of induced hypoxia (e.g. oxygen-binding plant proteins) in aquatic systems from leaf litter of the invasive Amur honeysuckle shrub. This change to aquatic ecosystems can impact larval amphibian survival and reduce the abundance of aquatic life. In addition to winning the John W. Thieret Award, Stephanie also received the 2011 NKU Faculty Senate Award.

Departmental Award: Elizabeth Shelley
John W. Thieret Award: Stephanie Hayes
Clara Richards Awards: Amy Clippinger & Katarina Schneider

KAS 2010 Undergraduate Research Competition
Cellular and Molecular Biology
3rd Place Paper: Osniel Gonzalez
Ecology and Environmental Science
1st Place Paper: Stephanie Hayes
Health Sciences
2nd Place Paper: Julie Cardosi
Microbiology
3rd Place Paper: Elizabeth Shelley
1st Place Poster: Virginia Shelley

2011 Tri-Beta Southeastern Regional Convention
District I & II
2nd Place Paper: Stephanie Hayes
District II
2nd Place Paper: Elizabeth Shelley
3rd Place Poster: Samantha Kaiser

Greaves Summer Fellows
Katherine Bachman
Austin Brown
Derek Gibbs
Osniel Gonzalez
D.W. Herrmann Summer Fellows
Jocelyn Fowler
Emily Esham
UR-STEM Summer Fellows
Kelsey Carnahan
Alex Niemer
Sarah Shaw
Carly Strohmaier
Cassie Volker
**ECOS:** ECOS was represented on a panel of students at the the Bioneers Conference discussing campus environmental action. Students participated in the Sierra Club Activist Weekend, and partnered with Kentuckians for the Commonwealth (KFTC) to sponsor a viewing of “Coal Country”. They fund raised and protested in Frankfort as part of “I HEART MOUNTAINS” Day. The theme this year was “Reap What You Sow”, and they participated in the “Can You Dig It?” tree planting event sponsored by the Campbell County Extension Office, and maintained two plots in the Community Gardens through NKU Wellness and the Extension Office. ECOS also expanded the annual Earth Day to Earth Week. 2011-12 officers are: President-Rosie Santos, Vice Presidents-Lauren Tesla and Diannea Wilson, Treasurer- Dakota Koch, and Secretary- Crystal Courtney.

**BIOTA:** BIOTA students participated in a variety of activities last year, connecting the NKU Biology Department with various areas of the community. They conducted outreach sessions on adaptations for Elementary Science Day at NKU in both the fall and spring. They raised money for several good causes, including a local elementary school. Several students helped setup and judge at the North Area Counties of Kentucky Exposition of Science (NACKES) in February. BIOTA students also participated in Reforest Northern Kentucky where they assisted in planting 1,800 trees at AJ Jolly Park. 2011-12 officers are: Becky Ortwein-President, Rebecca Rebholz–Vice President, Kevin Sommerkamp–Treasurer/Web Coordinator, Sarah Borgman–Secretary, and Whitney Thomas–Wellness.

**βββ:** Tri-Beta participated in many volunteer activities including the disinfection of toys and the recreational center at the Redwood Center for disabled children and adults, the annual Haunted House at St. Rita’s School for the Deaf, and the American Cancer Society’s Relay for Life, a fundraiser dedicated to celebrating the lives of those who have battled cancer. In November, numerous members presented their undergraduate research at the Kentucky Academy of Science meeting at Western Kentucky University. 2011-12 officers are: Tyler Broering-President, Virginia Shelley–Vice President, Katherine Bachman–Webmaster, Amy Clippinger-Treasurer, Melissa Oehrle–Secretary, Stevi Johnson-Wellness, and Laura McCullough–Historian.

**HPC:** HPC members took trips to the medical schools at the University of Kentucky and University of Louisville, meeting with admissions counselors and past NKU graduates for advice and guidance on getting accepted to medical school. Kaplan Test preparation worked closely with HPC by auctioning off a full class to one of our students. Members volunteered at Henry Hosea house and Ronald McDonald House, raised money for Relay for Life, and participated in a campus clean up day. They also conducted an HPC bowling night to get away from the stress of school, and to have some fun! 2011-12 officers are: Matt Woeste–President, Taylor Mason–Vice President, Kelsey Carnahan–Treasurer, Bobby Seilhamer–Webmaster, Diana Barrett–Secretary, and Kevin Connoly–Wellness.

Haunted House at St. Rita’s

Elementary Science Day at NKU
Alumni Updates

Dr. Reed Spaulding (06) graduated from the University of Louisville School of Medicine and will complete a melanoma project with Dr. Larry Douglass, Director of Pathology at Wood Hudson Laboratory. This fall Dr. Spaulding will begin a residency in pathology.

Dr. Kpandja Djawe (06) completed the PhD in Environmental Health at the University of Cincinnati College of Medicine.

Dr. Jennifer Quammen (03) completed the Doctor of Veterinary Medicine degree at The Ohio State University.

Brett Rossow (10), second year medical school student, spent six weeks as a leader of a non-profit medical brigade providing health care in clinics in Ecuador.

Andrew Carr (08) is the new president of the NKU Biology Alumni Association.

Amber Kuntz (10) is a Clinical Research Associate, traveling throughout the US monitoring clinical trials in oncology.

Alumni Association President Andrew Carr and Dr. Dick Durtsche at the Annual Alumni Party

To Our Alumni

We want to thank you for your generosity toward our department. We hope you will continue to support us. We also hope you enjoy this issue of The Biologist, it is written with you in mind, so that we can keep in touch. Take a moment and tell us where you are and what you are doing. You will find contact information on page 12. We look forward to hearing from you!

Alumni Events

Newport Aquarium Tour-Oct. 1
info: jmalvt@fuse.net

Commencement-Dec.17 & May 6
info: bigiron4440@hotmail.com

Annual Alumni Party-Feb. 24
@ Skyline Tavern
info: jmalvt@fuse.net

“Herping with Durtsche” - tentative for April
info: durtsche@nku.edu

“Wings and Cattails”-May 11
info: ecdietz@aol.com

Plant & Bulb Exchange-May 24
info: tdm850@fuse.net

Alumni Trip to Ecuador-tentative for June
info: jmalvt@fuse.net

Planning Meeting-July/August
info: bigiron4440@hotmail.com

Like us on Facebook: NKU Biology Alumni. Not on Facebook? Events are found at:
http://bioalumtravel.wordpress.com

To join the Biology Alumni Association email list, contact: jmalvt@fuse.net

Dr. Richard Boyce Gets A Haircut for Tri-Beta!!!

Dr. David Thompson offers Stevi Johnson some advice on her arduous task...

$2 entry fees were collected for guesses at the length that would be cut (in mm).
What is your guess?

The finished product! Wanna know how close your guess was? Contact Tri-Beta!


Curran CP, Nebert DW, Genter MB, Patel KV*, Schafer, TL, Skelton MR, Williams MT, Vorhees CV, 2011. In Utero and Lactational Exposure to PCBs in Mice: Adult Offspring Show Altered Learning and Memory Depending on Cyp1a2 and Ahr Genotypes. Environmental Health Perspectives, in press.


Hayes SJ*, Durscche RD, 2011. Aquatic hypoxia mediated by the decomposition of allochthonous leaf litter from the invasive shrub Amur honeysuckle (lonicera maximilla), Ecological Society of America Meetings.


To Miriam Kannan for winning the NKU Outstanding Faculty Award, the Tri-Beta Outstanding Chapter Advisor Award, AND the English Language Learning Foundation Educator of the Year Award!!!

Debra Pearce received over $8,000 to conduct A.P. Biology courses with Holy Cross, Bishop Brossart, and Newport Central Catholic High Schools.

Lindsay Walters won the Animal Behavior Society Founders' Award for best poster presented at the annual meeting.

Joseph Mester received $101,550 to study effects of influenza A & respiratory syncytial virus on the immune system.

Bethany Bowling received $9,900 to study undergraduate student understanding of genetics concepts.

To Lindsay Walters and Greg Dahlem for hosting a Scripps Howard Center discussion on Advances in our Knowledge of Human Evolution.

Kristi Haik received $39,280 to continue research on nanoparticle interactions with the blood-brain barrier.

Richard Boyce received $1,392 for studies on the invasive Amur honeysuckle and its impact on native plant species.

David Thompson joined members of the CPE and biology faculty from KY colleges and universities for the Kentucky Tuning Project to develop biology core concepts and learning objectives.

Robert Seilhamer, from the Charles Acosta lab, was awarded the Red Barrington Scholarship from the Northern Kentucky Fly Fishers Association.

Chris Curran was selected to participate in a Genomics Workshop at the National Human Genome Research Institute.

To Kristi Haik who was elected as Counselor for the Biology Division of the Council on Undergraduate Research.

Rebecca Kelley & ENV 220 (Protecting Water Resources) received the Resolution of Recognition and Appreciation Award from Sanitation District#1.

Chris Curran received $26,000 for research on genetic susceptibility to PCB-induced developmental neurotoxicity.

Patrick Schultheis received the NIH KBRIN Tech-Post Doc Support Tech Award.

Hazel Barton received over $300,000 to further her research on cave microbial ecology and white nose syndrome in bats.

Richard Boyce performed at the Fleadh Cheoil na hEireann (Festival of Music in Ireland) in County Cavan, Ireland.
We want to hear from you!

Contact us at: thebiologist@nku.edu

Please include: Contact Information / e-mail / Class year
What’s new? (promotions, special recognitions, change of job, civic involvement, family, research, travel, etc.)

For current activities check out the following websites:

βββ: [http://access2.nku.edu/bbb/](http://access2.nku.edu/bbb/)
BIOTA: [http://www.nku.edu/~bowlingb2/BIOTA.html](http://www.nku.edu/~bowlingb2/BIOTA.html)
ECOS: [http://envsci.nku.edu/ecos/](http://envsci.nku.edu/ecos/)
HPC: [http://studenthome.nku.edu/~healthprof/](http://studenthome.nku.edu/~healthprof/)
BIO ALUMNI: [http://www.nku.edu/~bioalum/](http://www.nku.edu/~bioalum/)

INVEST IN NKU BIOLOGY

Please donate to help our students and biology programs!

Name/Organization ____________________________________________ I want to give $10
Address ____________________________________________________ $50
___________________________________________________________ $100

other $_____ 

Detach and send to: Biological Sciences Support
Science Center 204D
Northern Kentucky University
Nunn Dr.
Highland Heights, KY 41099