

THE HUB

June 2005

Boyce Thompson Institute for Plant Research

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From the Hot Seat... **State of the Institute**

by David Stern

Typically there is a “State of the Institute” staff meeting following the May meeting of the Board of Directors. I promised to fill everyone in via the Hot Seat, since the Auditorium is a construction zone. I was asked a few questions about the Board itself, so I will address those first, then highlight the outcome of the meeting. I want to thank Valleri, Donna, and the Management Team for contributing in one way or another to this article.

What does the Board do? I always used to wonder that myself. Basically, it has two functions, both fiduciary. One is to watch over the finances, to make sure we can meet our short- and long-term obligations, including approval of our annual budget. The Finance, Audit and Investment committees are engaged in this area. The second function is to make sure that BTI is fulfilling its mission. While this also requires watching the money, it also entails supervising the President (that would be me), electing officers of the Institute (e.g. Vice Presidents), keeping track of the research (e.g. Annual Report, Research Oversight Committee), and helping to promote BTI. Anyone who wants to read the bylaws, which govern board activities, just see Donna.

The Board is here only occasionally – so how can they do all that? Fair question. Prior to Board meetings we send them a big package of material, which they allegedly read. We also keep them up to date with newsletters (Shawna does this between meetings). Various members of the staff also interact with Board members between meetings – some committees meet up to four times per year. I also visit with individual Board members: I had about a dozen such visits between October and May. Occasional Board meetings are good for the Institute – they allow us to operate fairly freely, and in recognizing this, the Board doesn’t “micromanage” us.

Who should be impressing whom? I think the right answer to this is it should work both ways. Ideally, Board members extol BTI during their travels, and in doing so help us gain visibility, recruit faculty, and so on. They should also help us connect to new opportunities. We need to impress them with the quality of our operation in order to generate enthusiasm. On the other hand, Board members like to bring new ideas to the table, and to do so they need to be engaged and understand the Institute. Most Board members work hard in this direction.

How are new Board members chosen, and how are they helping us? Well, I could fill a whole issue of The Hub with a discussion of this sort. Basically, we want Board members who will cover both the Board’s obligations – financial and mission-oriented – so we need a mix of experience. Recruiting Board members is hard work – and it’s one of the ways Board members work for us. The financial oversight of the Institute is also hard work, and the happy state of our endowment and pension fund is evidence of this, although the work itself is invisible to most staff. The ROC has also been very engaged in a variety of ways over the past several years – for example in massaging the tenure process and meeting with scientists. Of course, we all love Board members who are financially generous to the Institute – but BTI is in the fortunate position of not depending on such generosity to survive.

I hope the above helps with a little better understanding of the Board. I am still learning in this area, and expect to keep doing so.

Now, onto the recent Board meeting and the outcome...

Board meetings involve a lot of preparation, leading to the package of materials alluded to above. It also involves stowing the shorts and sandals for a couple of days, cleanup, and flower arrangements, to show respect for our visitors. We share several meals, and talk a lot. While many of the activities are traditional, we try to keep things fresh (e.g. Nicole ran a mini-lab module for Board members this time). So here are a few highlights:

- We welcomed 3 new members: Karen Kindle, Lead, Bioinformatics, Genomics Technology, Monsanto; Alan Bilosky, Visiting Lecturer of Finance, Cornell University; and Crispin Taylor, Executive Director, American Society for Plant Biologists. We also adjusted our Cornell Directors to include Maureen Hanson, Bill Crepet and Steve Kresovich.

- The mini-symposium arranged by Maria Harrison was very successful. Maureen Hanson also gave a presentation to the Board on plant cell imaging. We will proceed with the purchase of a confocal microscope and arrange access to a laser capture microdissection unit. Various funding arrangements are under discussion.

- The Board supports our open-ended approach to faculty hiring, now underway. Maria Harrison, Haiyang Wang, and Peter Moffet will constitute the search committee. We hope to resume interviews in the fall. Remember that all scientific staff are encouraged to help us find potential candidates, even if it seems a little early. We want to be creative.

- We were encouraged by the Board to develop Institute-wide principles of ethical conduct (this means in research and business); this is in progress.

- We changed our main legal firm to a more local one (Hancock and Estabrook, based in Syracuse). This should roughly cut our legal fees in half.

- The endowment and pension trusts were up 5% and 6%, respectively, over the last 12 months. This is a bit below our historical rate of return, but it’s been a rough year for the markets.

- The Board voted to award Alan Wood emeritus status, as recommended by a faculty committee and myself.

- We were asked by the Board to arrange for analysis of our pension plan. Right now, we have a “defined benefit” plan – something like social security. Is that the best model for our employees? We need to take a careful look and see.

- We had an active discussion on intellectual property, where we have had strong income from licensing of insect cell lines for protein expression. We welcome input from the Board with respect to IP.

At the end of all this, it’s back to shorts and sandals (for some of us), and an end to the free food (or at least, tons of free food). Thanks again to everyone for helping to make the Board meeting a success.



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“Exploring Ethics in Scientific Research”

Friday, July 8
9:00 - 11:30
James Law Auditorium
(in the Vet School)

ALL BTI researchers should attend!
Project Leaders
Postdoctoral/Research Associates
Graduate Students
Technicians

Lunch'n'Learn Seminar

“Balancing Work & Family”

July 11th
12:00-1:30
BTI Atrium
RSVP to Lucy Pola by July 6th

The Hub

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Management UpD8!!

The first part of May was dedicated to preparing for and participating in the annual Board meeting. See David's "Hot Seat" article for details on the Board meeting. In addition to Board meeting action items, here are some of the other things we have been working on:

- The Auditorium – if you haven't noticed it in its state of chaos, you are spending way too much time in the lab. Most recent reports indicate that we are on schedule for this renovation, although the lighting part of the project is exceeding our budget expectations.
- New Teaching Lab – Nicole Markelz will be able to use the former Topa lab as a teaching lab for her and others' outreach activities. Thanks to some donated computers and other lab equipment, Nicole is off to a great start. Funds from the Kohut bequest will be used to equip the lab initially – and the lab will be named in their memory.
- Did you know...that in 1967 BTI purchased a 1% share of the Listerine Royalty Interest (LRI) for \$350,000? Annual license payments over the life of the investment total \$2.42 million. Keep buying Listerine!!!
- Lucy, Nicole and Georg are working on a joint project to bring a new scientific ethics seminar to BTI employees. Scheduled for 9:00am, July 8th, the discussion will be led by Dr. Ronald Kline, Bovay Professor in the History & Ethics of Professional Engineering, Electrical Engineering/Science & Technology Studies, at Cornell University. Dr. Kline will lead this discussion, beginning with a brief overview of scientific integrity issues, followed by an in-depth examination of several case studies. Participants will break up into groups to discuss the case studies, then will come back together to review them as a whole. **ALL** researchers are asked to attend - project leaders, postdoctoral and research associates, graduate students and technicians.
- Good news on energy!!! May's energy bills are in and it looks like we will be approximately \$110K under our allotment from Cornell. It will be interesting to see what the June heat wave does to our next bill.
- Still plugging away on the PI interface with the accounting system. John has put this project back on the front burner and he and Joanne are working to move this forward.
- The library book auction netted \$10K, less than expected. This may have been partially due to a power failure during the auction preventing people from bidding on line. Thanks, Joan and Berta for working so hard on this.
- Replacing Larry Willard – despite the high bar that has been set, we are in the midst of interviewing candidates for the Maintenance Manager position. We have several strong candidates for this job and hope to make a decision soon.

WING DING!!

Thursday, June 30th
12:30 pm
BTI Atrium
\$5.00

Sign up with Valleri by June 29th!

PIE PALOOZA!!

July 26th!!!

Watch for more details...

Outreach Updates!

by Nicole Markelz

It's that time of year again; the summer interns have arrived! Our 2005 batch of undergraduates started in their labs on June 6th after an orientation to the building and greenhouse safety training by Brian Bell. And we have quite the "crop" this year! In the Brutnell lab are Kyle Skottke (RIT), Lauren Pitt (Brigham Young University), Colin Haines (Bucknell University), Mike Nullet (Cornell University), and returning interns Lisa Kennedy and Greg Olsefski. The Comstock/McCouch lab have one intern now, Anthony Sherland (Lincoln University) and will be joined by Chau Sa Nguyen (De Anza College) in a couple of weeks. The Klessig lab welcomed Thihan Padukkavidana from CSU-Fresno, while Caleb Knepper (Kansas State) joined the Wang lab. The Moffett lab has one intern already, Diana Taft (Cornell University), and is expecting their second, Amy Berkley from Central Washington State University, in a week. On the third floor, the Stern lab is hosting Diane Addo-Yobo (Drury University) for the summer. On the fourth floor, Tatiana Toro-Ramos (University of Puerto Rico, Mayaguez campus) has joined the Jander lab, while the Harrison lab has Cory Ellison (Baldwin-Wallace College) as their new addition. The Giovannoni lab has two new interns, Jose Soto (CSU-Fresno) and Adedayo Fahoyin (University of Wisconsin, Madison) and is sharing a third with the Tomato Genomics group, Benjamin Cole from RPI. Welcome to BTI!

In addition to the students in the building, we have a bunch down campus as well: Amarachukwu Enemuoh (Tomato Genomics group), Egbert Simon (Doyle lab), Katrice Bullock (Rose lab), Justin Miller and Lucas Thornblade (both in the Kochian lab), Leah Elliot (Hanson lab) and Mike Martin (Collmer lab). You might be seeing these folks around the building for their Monday seminar series or to pick up paychecks. If you are keeping track, there's 18 interns at BTI, 25 total, and we haven't even gotten the high school students in yet!

In other outreach news, our proposal, titled "Teaching microarrays without the expensive equipment" was selected for the Education Booth at the ASPB meeting in Seattle. Be sure to stop by if you are attending the meeting.

Coming up: High school interns arrive, as well as eight teachers for the Curriculum Development Workshop, in July.

Arrivals & Departures

Farewell to...

Caitlin Kauffman who has accepted a position with the Smithsonian Institute in Washington in their international division.

Katia Anufrikova who is moving to Ottawa with her husband, who has a new job.

Sophia Ekengren who has a new job as Principal Investigator at Stockholm University, Plant Physiology.

David Weinstein who is joining the Cornell Department of Natural Resources as a Senior Research Associate. He will be running his own programs in risk assessment of threats to forest ecosystems and in air pollutant effects on forests.

Welcome back to **Bruce Cahoon**, Asst. Professor at Middle Tennessee State University, has returned to the Stern lab for the summer to conduct research on maize chloroplast development. Bruce has been awarded an NSF Research Opportunity Summer Award. It's nice to see Bruce again.

Steve MacKinnon is in the Stern lab for the summer studying Chlamydomonas exoribonucleases. Steve is a junior at the University of Waterloo. Welcome Steve.

Talks & Travels

This month's entire article was submitted by Owen Hoekenga.

I've done a fair bit of traveling this year, which has allowed me to speak on two recently funded research programs in the Kochian Lab:

January, 2005 - 13th Plant and Animal Genome Conference in San Diego, CA. I gave a seminar in the Abiotic Stress Workshop on our NSF Plant Genome funded project on maize aluminum tolerance (Leon Kochian PI, Owen Hoekenga, Ed Buckler and Joss Rose co-PI's; \$935,000 over 5 years).

April, 2005 - 22nd Annual Missouri Symposium "Genomics and Beyond: Frontiers in Plant Biology", Columbia, MO. I was given the opportunity to close the symposium (a retirement tribute to Edward H. Coe after a 50+ year career at Missouri with the USDA-ARS) as a replacement speaker.

May, 2005 - 3rd Annual Brazilian Plant Breeding Congress, Gramado RS. I was an invited speaker and gave a plenary seminar on genomics-related research on aluminum tolerance in maize and sorghum. This speech highlighted a recently funded project from the Generation Challenge Program of the CGIAR Centers comprised of Kochian, Buckler and myself from Ithaca, eight collaborators from three Embrapa research institutes (Brazilian version of USDA ARS) and Moi University in Kenya (\$900,000 over 3 years). In Gramado, I met six of the eight Brazilian scientists and we had an organizational meeting for our project. Following the symposium, I visited the Embrapa Institute for Maize and Sorghum Research, which gave me a chance to meet the remainder of my Brazilian collaborators and their students.

May & June Service Anniversaries

Kim Huizinga	14 yrs
Brian Gollands	13 yrs
Donna Meyer	6 yrs
Tom Bollenbach	6 yrs
Don White	6 yrs
Suma Chakravarthy	4 yrs
Corina Vlot	2 yrs
Ignacio Maldonado-Mendoza	2 yrs
Melina Lopez-Meyer	2 yrs
Yongzeng Wang	1 yr
Jeff Heichel	1 yr
Dustin Scheve	1 yr
Patrick Givalisco	1 yr
Sang Wook Park	1 yr

Grants ★ Awards ★ Recognition ★ Rewards ★ Kudos

★ CONGRATULATIONS!! ★

Many of you know **Alan Wood**, who was a member of the BTI faculty for more than 30 years. At its recent meeting, the Board of Directors voted to accord Alan the status of Emeritus Scientist, recognizing his distinguished service to BTI as well as nationally. Alan plans to return to the Ithaca area later this year from Mississippi State, where he has been Director of the Life Sciences and Biotechnology Institute. We look forward to Alan's future contributions to BTI as an emeritus scientist.

Dr. Thomas J. Wolpert, now at Oregon State University, has received the "Noel T. Keen Award for Research in Molecular Plant Pathology. Dr. Wolpert worked with Vlado Macko at BTI when he left in 1993 to join the Department of Botany and Plant Pathology at OSU. He is investigating diseases caused by fungal pathogens, which produce host-selective toxins.

Greg Martin received two supplements to his NSF grant entitled "Role of MAPKKKα-Mediated Cell Death in Plant Disease Resistance and Susceptibility". The supplements total \$40,854.00 and also received an additional \$120,000.00 on his NSF grant entitled "Role of the Pti4 and Pti5 Transcription Factors in Pto-Mediated Defense Gene Activation and Disease Resistance".

Greg is also a co-recipient of a BARD grant. The PI, Guido Sessa, is from Tel Aviv University. Guido was a postdoc here at BTI several years ago. The grant is entitled, "Role of GRAS transcription factors in tomato disease resistance and basal defense" and the award is for 3 years.

Greg Martin has recently been elected as a Fellow to the American Academy of Microbiology. The American Academy of Microbiology is the leadership group within the Am. Soc. for Microbiology serving the Society, the scientific community, governmental agencies, and the public. The selection process is based on outstanding scientific achievement in the microbiological sciences. Congratulations Greg.

David Stern received a supplement to his NSF grant entitled "From Proplastid to Chloroplast: Understanding Plastid Differentiation in Maize Through Microarray and Proteome Analysis" for \$18,880.

Gary Blissard received another 5 years of funding totaling \$978,873.00 from HHS to continue his research on "Baculovirus envelope proteins and insect cells".

Nicole Markelz will be attending the American Society of Plant Biologists meeting in Seattle and was one of three to have a proposal selected for an Educational Booth display. Nicole was awarded \$500 towards expenses, as well as registration fees for herself, **Carina Barth** and **Jeff Gordon**.

David Weinstein was just awarded a grant from the USDA Forest Service for \$263,829, entitled, "Probabilistic Risk Assessment Methodologies for Western Wildlands."

Dan Klessig was awarded \$643,638 from NSF for a four-year grant entitled "Characterization of the High Affinity Salicylic Acid-Binding Protein 2 in Plant Disease Resistance."

Rob Abramovitch was recently selected by Cornell's directors of graduate studies in the plant sciences graduate fields to receive the "Barbara McClintock Award". Primary consideration for this award is a graduate student with the best potential and greatest background merit. Rob received a framed certificate to recognize his achievements along with financial support for his research. Outstanding job, Rob!

Congratulations to **Elaine VanEtten** on her graduating with a MSW degree. Now BTI has their own "in-house" social worker. YOU GO GIRL! - *Kate Krupnik*

Kudos go out to **Lisa Christian** and a year-late kudos to **Shirley Geddes** for their work preparing the intern paychecks. I thank you and I'm sure the interns are even more grateful for all of your help!
- *Nicole Markelz*

I would like to send kudos to **Shirley Geddes, Kim Huizinga, Kay Blake, Lisa Christian, Jeff Heichel, John Dentes** and **Doug Carruthers** for withstanding the pressure of having their picture taken. Also, kudos go to Valleri for taking the photo. Nice smiles everybody!
- *Joanne Carruthers*

Kudos also go to **Kay Blake** for completing the awful task of changing all the Budget Type's in the Navision System.
- *Joanne Carruthers*

Kudos to **Joanne Carruthers** for making a great work atmosphere for the Business Office employees.
- *Jeff Heichel*

Kudos to **Joan Curtiss** and the guys in the lab (including **Hong Gu, Jitae, Gyu In** and **Dhiren**) for tremendous assistance in conversion of PowerPoint slides.
- *Dan Klessig*

Kudos to whomever keeps putting chocolate in the basket outside of the room formerly known as "the library office".
- *Patricia Keen*

Kudos to **Mary Westlake!** Thanks for all your help setting up the atrium for the Plant Pathology Distinguished Lecture. The seminar had to be moved to the BTI auditorium with very little advance notice because of a problem with the scheduled lecture room on campus. There was some scrambling to make it all happen and I especially appreciate your help setting up the refreshments and tending to other details with the room. There was a full house and everything went off without a hitch! Many thanks.
- *Greg Martin*

Berta Gutierrez has spent the last month inspecting, researching value and removing books from the catalog system. She has quickly and accurately assessed the entire collection in preparation of their removal from the library. It's been a long, tedious (and sometimes sad) process but she's done a phenomenal job, making her very deserving of a hearty "atta girl". ATTA GIRL!!

Great New Website!!

Thanks to our website team, our intranet is much easier to navigate. Check out some of these pages!
Bookmark them for future use!

Policies and Procedures:

<http://bti.cornell.edu/page.php?id=813>

Forms, Forms, Forms:

<http://bti.cornell.edu/page.php?id=241>

Hiring Toolkit:

<http://bti.cornell.edu/page.php?id=861>

Job Descriptions:

<http://bti.cornell.edu/page.php?id=862>

Employee Handbook:

http://bti.cornell.edu/pdfs/hr/hrpolicies/Employee_Handbook.pdf

Immigration Update

Here are some updates regarding H1B petitions. If you have any questions, please let Lucy or Valleri know.

In December, 2004, the Fiscal Year 2005 Consolidated Appropriations Act was signed into law. This law incorporated several provisions affecting the H1-B specialty worker category. Two provisions of the law are of significance to BTI and they have been summarized below.

New \$500 anti-fraud fee. Effective for petitions filed on or after March 8, 2005, there will be a new \$500 “fraud protection and detection fee”. This new fee will have to be paid by all employers (including institutions of higher education) who file an H1B petition for: a) initial petitions to grant an alien H1B status, and b) for petitions requesting an H1B nonimmigrant to change employers. The fee will not be required for extension of H1B status for those already at BTI. A petition is considered “filed” when it has been received by USCIS. We will begin submitting H1B petitions with the \$500 fee immediately. This fee is in addition to the general filing fee of \$185.

5% rule eliminated. The H1B “prevailing wage 5 % rule,” which considered employers paying no less than 95 percent of the prevailing wage as meeting the prevailing wage requirements, will be eliminated; employers will now have to pay at least 100% of the prevailing wage to comply with that wage requirement. This change is also effective on March 8, 2005. BTI has had very few problems with paying the prevailing wage, so this should have minimal impact on your hiring decisions.

Fun Committee Feedback

by Valleri

Summer Family Picnic? YES NO
 SATURDAY WEEKDAY
 OFF-PREMISE BEHIND BTI GREENHOUSES

December Trip to NYC for Radio City Music Hall Holiday Show and Shopping
(tickets ~\$50+) http://www.radiocity.com/rc_xs_index.html

THE HUB

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