



# Scoop

July 2, 2004

THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS MEDICAL SCHOOL AT HOUSTON

## Events to Know

### July

- 5 Skeleton holiday.**
- 8 John Freeman Bldg. Fire Alarm Inspection,** 6-7:30 a.m., strobes and sounders tested. 8 a.m.-5 p.m., smoke detectors, duct detectors and pull stations tested without activation of the fire alarm system. Questions, call 713-500-3433 or 713-500-8109.
- 7 & 13 Benefits Brown Bag Sessions,** noon, MSB 2.006.
- 15 TMC Food Drive Party,** 11 a.m.-1 p.m., Webber Plaza.
- 15 12th Annual UT Scholarship Golf Classic Early Bird Special.** Last day for special, for event on Mon., Sept. 27. Visit <http://www.uth.tmc.edu/golf>.
- 26 President's Forum, President James T. Willerson** speaking, 11:30 a.m., MSB 2.135.

## UTMost Interest

Dean Stanley Schultz was interviewed by KTRK-TV Channel 13 June 25 concerning the Medical School's flood recovery and precautions...**Dr. Luis Miele**, Surgery, **Dr. Hadar Merhav**, Surgery, and **Dr. Rafael Botero**, Hepatology, were honored by the American Liver Foundation with an Excellence Award for "the lives saved through excellence in organ recovery"

by the American Liver Foundation event...**Dr. Ward Casscells**, Internal Medicine, and **Dr. Ferid Murad**, Integrative Biology & Pharmacology, were in the news regarding nanotechnology (*Houston Chronicle* 6/27/04)...**Dr. Ferid Murad** appeared on KUHT-TV June 29 on a panel discussion of stem cell research.

**ON THE MOVE** - The Office of Radiation Safety and Chemical Safety has moved as of June 17. The new location is the Cyclotron Facility, CYF G.102. For immediate assistance, call 713-500-8100.

## DRAGOI RECEIVES NATIONAL RECOGNITION

**Valentin Dragoi, Ph.D.**, assistant professor, Neurobiology and Anatomy, recently was honored as a 2004 Pew Scholar, a distinction conferred on just 20 scientists nationwide each year.

Dragoi studies how the visual cortex processes and updates information—or, how the brain “sees” items and how our perception of the world changes over time as new information is added.



**Dr. Valentin Dragoi**

He and his research team accomplish this by recording the activity of multiple neurons in the brains of alert laboratory animals as they perform specific behavioral tasks. They compare these findings with human psychophysics and computer models to determine patterns of neural activity relevant to visual behavior.

“I believe that this research can possibly lead to a virtual reality-type of sight for the blind and for those who experience low vision,” said Dragoi. “We have a novel approach—we monitor alert animals and alert humans and compare what they perceive over time. Needless to say, performing imaging tests on alert animals and humans is challenging. But this research shows real promise for practical applications.”

Dragoi, a native of Romania, received his bachelor's degree in computer science in 1989. He left Romania in 1992 and went on to earn a Ph.D. from Duke University in 1997 and completed postgraduate work from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. He joined the faculty here at the Medical School just a year ago.

The Pew Charitable Trusts awards a \$240,000 grant over four years to support the research of each Pew Scholar. Dragoi is the fourth UT Health Science Center at Houston scientist to be named a Pew Scholar in the last six years.

- S. Rasp

## COMMUNITY SERVICE WINNERS GIVE BACK

This year's student recipients of the Second Annual Outstanding Community Service Awards are: **Anthony Sutton, Aja Fowler, Brandon Fields, Erica Kasper, Omonole Ohen, Chirag Patel, Manuel Reyes** (all MS), **Manuel Gonzalez, Eric Williams, Shen-An Hwang, Joanna Koch, Meghan Minard** (GSBS), **Dawn Shelton** (SHIS), **Carol Girocco**, (SON), and **Laura Bull** (SPH). Other awardees were **Drs. Michael Shannon, Jeremy Chance, and Tyrone Rodriguez**, all DB graduates; and **Dr. Alan Wells**, an SPH grad. The awards were established last year to honor students who have devoted time and effort to improving the community through educational outreach. This year's awards consisted of a certificate, an autographed copy of Dr. Bryant Boutwell's "Conversations with a Medical School" or a \$50 bookstore certificate. Graduating students were presented with an Outstanding Community Service plaque.



Community service activities included outreach with high school students from Valley View High School, who participated in mixing, pouring, and setting various dental materials to create precise stone models.



THE UNIVERSITY of TEXAS  
HEALTH SCIENCE CENTER AT HOUSTON  
MEDICAL SCHOOL

Stanley Schultz, M.D., Interim Dean  
Darla Brown, Director  
e-mail: [M.Darla.Brown@uth.tmc.edu](mailto:M.Darla.Brown@uth.tmc.edu)  
Colleen O'Brien, Editor  
e-mail: [Colleen.L.O'Brien@uth.tmc.edu](mailto:Colleen.L.O'Brien@uth.tmc.edu)  
Phone: 713-500-5114; FAX: (713) 500-0597  
E-Scoop online:  
[http://www.med.uth.tmc.edu/community\\_affairs/escoop.htm](http://www.med.uth.tmc.edu/community_affairs/escoop.htm)  
Produced weekly by the Office of Community Affairs and Public Education



## HURRICANE, FLOODING PLANS AT THE READY

When the skies darken around the Texas Medical Center during the middle of the day, and flash flood warnings pop up on the TV screen and via e-mail, employees may start getting nervous, but the health science center offices of Facilities Planning & Engineering and Environmental Health and Safety start consulting the emergency situation response plan.



**Plans are in place to mitigate the effects of storms as powerful as Tropical Storm Allison was.**

“Dealing with a hurricane is easier for us because there is more advanced warning, compared to flash flooding,” said Bruce Brown, director of Environmental Health and Safety.

### Prepared for a hurricane

For a hurricane, planning begins 72 hours before predicted landfall. “At that time, we pull together our ride-out team, which will ride out the storm on campus, and facilities’ staffing beefs up to 24 hours a day,” Brown said.

A check of supplies – such as flood pumps, water, and radios — and contact information for all response personnel also happens at this early stage. “Facilities makes sure the fuel tanks for generators are topped off and that storm drains aren’t obstructed,” he added.

At 48 hours out, personnel are designated to remain on duty through the storm and equipment is secured. “We also ensure that all construction sites are secured and cleaned up to avoid flying debris,” Brown said.

At 24 hours before predicted landfall, noncritical systems may be de-activated and the series of flood doors are closed. There is a specific order of closing the flood doors and gates to protect the building and its contents. The first gates to be closed are located in the basement and the last flood door to be closed will be the one at the Ross Sterling entrance. It takes about 5 minutes to close each door, which must be done manually.

“We have the ability to start protecting the building by closing the flood doors with people still in it because our new emergency exits of the Medical School Building are located above the 500 year flood level, so people can still exit the building with the flood doors closed,” Brown added.

“Also at this time we recommend whether or not the building should be closed. President Willerson and the executive leadership make the ultimate decision in consultation with the dean on closing the school,” Brown said.

### Flash flood and tropical storm plans

The difference between a tropical storm and a hurricane is that a tropical storm’s sustained winds are less than 74 miles per hour, Brown explained. “But tropical storms can turn into hurricanes, so we’re flexible in our plan,” he said.

There are two sets of plans, one for flash flooding and tropical storms and the other for hurricanes. These plans start the cascade of events that can result in the securing of the new flood doors and gates of the Medical School and the closing of the building.

The Texas Medical Center flood alert uses a color-coded system to let institutions know what stage of planning they should implement. The color and level of urgency is determined by professional judgment and the Harris Gully box culvert readings, which measure the amount of cubic feet of water flowing through it per second. The latest reading on the alert system as well as a BayouCam aimed at the culvert can be viewed at <http://www.floodalert.org>.

Yellow is flood caution – with water flowing at 20,000 cu. ft. per second there is an estimated 10-20 percent chance of flooding. “We check our supplies, pumps, generators, and review the contact list at this stage,” Brown said.

At the orange stage, water is flowing 24,000 cu. ft. per second and there is a 40-50 percent of flooding if storms persist. “If it’s the tail end of a storm, we’re not as concerned as if we have another storm coming in right behind it,” Brown said. At this stage, the group activates the communications center and begins to close flood gates and doors, clearing drains, and securing the roof.

At red, water is flowing faster than 28,000 cu. ft. per second, which means a 80-90 percent chance of flooding. “At this time we would recommend closure of building, make sure the ride-out crew is in place, and shut down nonessential equipment. Again, President Willerson and the executive leadership make the ultimate decision to close a building in concert with the dean,” he said.

### Lessons learned

“One of the biggest things we learned from Tropical Storm Allison is the importance of keeping contact lists up to date and having alternative means of communication,” Brown said.

Now there is a Texas Medical Center-wide radio system for institutions to receive warnings and updates on the bayou during rain. “The radio is tested twice a day, and they take it very seriously,” he added.

“It is important for departments to realize they need to have their own specific plans and contact lists,” Brown noted. In addition, departments should not plan on assistance from Facilities personnel with specific departmental actions as they will be busy preparing the building for the storm.

All of the flood mitigation efforts being incorporated into the Medical School Building’s reconstruction project also are the results of lessons from Allison. Flood doors and gates, elevating emergency exits, the granite and flood glass wall that encircles the building, and the move of critical operations and systems from the basement to higher ground are all efforts to protect the building and its contents.

“We are constantly preparing because we know it’s not if, but when another storm will hit,” Brown said.

- D. Brown



**Flood doors and gates are now in place because of lessons learned from Tropical Storm Allison.**