6-15-2001

Washington University Record, June 15, 2001

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.wustl.edu/record

Recommended Citation

http://digitalcommons.wustl.edu/record/901

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Washington University Publications at Digital Commons@Becker. It has been accepted for inclusion in Washington University Record by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons@Becker. For more information, please contact engeszer@wustl.edu.
Employee help centerpiece of new program

BY JESSICA N. ROBERTS

The University’s Office of Human Resources will offer an Employee Assistance Program (EAP) beginning July 1. “We are excited to offer this benefit to our employees and their family members as a way to help balance the work and life issues we all face,” said Lorraine Goffe-Rush, director of employee relations.

The EAP provides confidential, professional counseling for benefits-eligible University employees and their family members to help resolve problems that are affecting their personal lives or job performances. The program will be managed by People Resources, a nationally known professional consulting firm specializing in employer assistance services.

People Resources’ services have been prepared by the University as part of the EAP benefit package. Employees can contact People Resources 24 hours a day, seven days a week to schedule a confidential appointment with a specialist. In case of an emergency, a specialist can be contacted directly at any time.

EAP specialists have professional training and expertise in a wide range of issues such as marriage and family problems, financial difficulties, stress and well-being counseling. They can provide counseling and referrals for employees and their immediate family members, up to the age of 21.

Counselors are available to assist in crises or with long-term issues. Confidential appointment with a counselor is required before receiving specified services.

People Resources’ services are comprehensive and can be used by employees, spouses and dependents. It is available to all University employees and their family members.

People Resources’ services include:

- Counseling
- Referrals to health care providers
- Documentation for insurance payments.

People Resources’ services may be used by employees who are not eligible for the University’s medical plan. People Resources’ services are provided free of charge.

People Resources’ services are not available for employees who have purchased permits. People Resources’ services are provided free of charge.

The health benefits open enrollment deadline for University employees has been extended to June 20. This is a final enrollment opportunity for those employees who missed the original May 31 deadline and need to complete their initial application for health insurance or waiver of health benefits.

To ensure enrollment for the plan year beginning July 1, employees must take their applications or waiver to either the benefits office on the Medical School Campus, the human resources office on the Hilltop Campus or the benefits office on the West Campus. Do not send the enrollment forms or waiver to either benefits office.

For more information, call your benefits department.

World-renowned biologist Hamburger dies at 100

BY TONY FITZPATRICK

Viktor Hamburger, Ph.D., famed biologist and the Edward Mallinckrodt Distinguished University Professor Emeritus in Arts & Sciences, died Tuesday, June 12, 2001, in St. Louis after a short illness. He was 100.

Hamburger was considered a giant in neurobiology, embryology and the study of programmed cell death. He often has been referred to as “the father of neuroembryology.”

“Viktor Hamburger was a pioneer in biology and a person who encouraged the careers of others,” Chancellor Mark S. Wrighton said. “His impact on science is immeasurably large, and Washington University has flourished as a consequence of his work. We will miss him, but his great contributions will be long remembered.”

Hamburger was born July 9, 1900, in Landeshut, Germany, now part of Poland. He earned a doctorate from the University of Freiburg in 1925 for research performed under Theodor Boveri during the period of the famous “Organizer” experiments. After

One year later

Robotic heart graft patients alive, well

BY GIL Z. RECKESS

Scientists are one step closer to performing minimally invasive heart surgery thanks to new robotic technology. Researchers now have completed the first North American pilot trial of endoscopic heart surgery performed with assistance from a robot. At the one-year follow-up, all 19 patients who underwent the procedure were alive and well. The results show it is possible to use endoscopic instruments for heart surgery, a goal that has long defied cardiothoracic surgeons.

“This is surgery meeting the information age,” said Ralph J. Damiano Jr., M.D., chief of cardiothoracic surgery within the Division of Cardiothoracic Surgery at the School of Medicine. “For the first time, we are integrating computers into the operating room to assist us in surgery. This may transform the way cardiac surgery is done in the future.”

Damiano led the study, published in the June issue of Annals of Surgery. The first author was Sunil M. Prasad, M.D., postdoctoral surgery fellow. During coronary artery bypass grafting, surgeons replace a closed or diseased artery with a healthy blood vessel from another part of the body. The invasive features of the procedure increase recovery time and the risk of complications. In order to access the heart, surgeons have to make a 12- to 18-inch incision in the chest and prop open the breastbone. This is one of the main sources of postoperative pain. To eliminate the large surgical incisions, surgeons in other fields can use endoscopic tools, which are inserted through small pencil-sized holes in the skin. But these devices are more than three times as long as traditional instruments and present several challenges to heart surgeons.

Imagine trying to sign your name with a 12- to 18-inch pen. You can do it, but your handwriting would probably be illegible. Moreover, these instruments are inserted through the chest wall, which is a fixed point. As

Parking policies clarified

BY JESSICA N. ROBERTS

To improve parking and parking access on the Hilltop and West campuses, the University is implementing and considering clarifying policies that focus on the enforcement of transportation guidelines. Updated campus parking policies are in the following areas: permit prices, enforcement hours, summer/holiday parking privileges, green parking permits, zone changes, parking fine enforcement and the Athletic Complex traffic route. The goal is to help ensure that parking is available to those who have purchased permits.

An evaluation of current parking operations concentrated on the inventories of the number and uses of parking spaces, fiscal operations, and rules and regulations was conducted with the goal of providing safe and well-maintained parking while balancing the competing uses for available parking spaces. Effective July 1, parking policies will be more aggressively enforced, and payment of fines will be required before renewal of permits during summer 2002.

Anyone who has not paid fines for violations incurred after July 1 and has not renewed their permits during summer 2002 will be required to pay fines before renewal of permits during fall 2002.

See Parking, Page 5

Green permit parking spaces in Throop Garage will increase.

Inside:

University researchers argue that Mars experienced extensive water erosion

Medical News: Unsuspected oxygen reserve found in human brain, study finds

Washington People: Michael Kass, M.D., balances hard work with his sense of humor

Volume 25 No. 32

June 15, 2001

Washington University in St. Louis
Food, fun greet employees on Staff Day

BY JESSICA N. ROBERTS

The rain held off for the day, providing the perfect atmosphere for more than 1,000 staff members participating in the 26th annual Staff Day May 21. Events kicked off at 2:30 p.m. with the Staff Service Award and Recognition Ceremony in Edison Theatre, hosted by Chancellor Mark S. Wrighton and Ann B. Prenatt, executive director of human resources. "We look forward to Staff Day each year," Prenatt said. "It provides the opportunity to congratulate our colleagues for their many years of service, thank staff members for their hard work and contributions to the University and have some fun."

Department heads recognized 178 merit recipients for their accomplishments and 113 employees who reached important milestones in years of University service (see listing, page 7). Standing ovations abounded as University employees cheered on their co-workers as they accepted their service awards.

Wrighton concluded the ceremony by honoring Jim Burnside, executive director of University relations, with the fourth annual Gloria W. White Award. After the ceremony, employees filled the lower level of Mallinckrodt Center and Senior Bowl at the university as they enjoyed a barbecue lunch.

Kickers provided activities were available to the staff after lunch. Gollers made their way to Forest Park, Lisa Goessling of Arts & Sciences and Joni Westerhouse of medical public affairs, Fred Landgraf of insurance and Cliff Sitter of computing and communications, and Joe Angeles of personal computing and development and Justin Hoyt from human resources won two $125 gift certificates to the business school Bookstore with no suggestions as to what they would do with the money. "I would probably buy some books," said Landgraf. "I'm an insurer for a living, so I should probably buy some books on insurance." Hoyt said he would use his gift certificate to buy some books on marketing. "I enjoy going to business school, so I think it would be fitting to buy some books on marketing," Hoyt said. "I enjoy going to business school, so I think it would be fitting to buy some books on marketing," Hoyt said.

Baskets, Barbala Stephens from Arts & Sciences and Beth Schterlie from the School of Engineering and Applied Science took second and third place for their pottery and needlepoint, respectively. "The first time I entered a competition," said Schterlie, "I won second place. This was my third place." "The first time I entered a competition," said Schterlie, "I won second place. This was my third place." "The first time I entered a competition," said Schterlie, "I won second place. This was my third place." "The first time I entered a competition," said Schterlie, "I won second place. This was my third place."

Soil Spirit Mission Update

Adventurer Steve Fossett will soon be taking off in Solo Spirit from Kapole, Australia, on a mission to be the first person to circumnavigate Earth solo by sailboat. Fossett is a veteran aviator and author, and has received numerous awards for his achievements. His previous mission, the "Round-the-World Solo" mission, was completed on February 16, 2001, when he crossed the finish line at St. Louis, Missouri. Fossett's mission will take him through the Southern Hemisphere, crossing the South Pole for the first time in history. The mission will be supported by the National Geophysical Research Institute (NGRI) and the University of Washington's Department of Earth and Space Sciences. The mission is expected to take approximately 80 days, with the first leg of the journey lasting about 25 days. Fossett will be using the latest in satellite technology and communication systems to transmit data and images from the ship to the mission control center in St. Louis, Missouri. The mission will be broadcast live on the Internet, allowing anyone to follow along with the adventure. Fossett's goal is to raise awareness about the importance of ocean conservation and to inspire people to take action to protect our planet.
Walker, Tucker to direct Center for Advanced Medicine

BY GIL Z. RECKESS

Scientists have discovered that, unlike many other organs, the brain doesn’t release a reserve of oxygen when the brain is active. This buffer allows the brain to adapt to new situations without demanding a sharp increase in oxygen.

"Our finding challenges the prevalent assumption that blood flow increases during tasks such as reading to raise oxygen content in the brain," study leader Mark A. Mintun, M.D., said. "The study, which was assumed in brain imaging studies that attempt to understand how the human brain functions," Mintun is a professor of radiology, psychiatry at the School of Medicine. "With the 14 clinical centers housed in the Center for Advanced Medicine, she will work with Tucker on issues that cross-cut departments or medical centers in areas that arise among departments or between the medical school and the business school." Tucker, who worked a clinical role in developing the Center for Advanced Medicine, also is directly involved in the operations of the Faculty Practice Plan. She formerly worked as a nurse clinician and a nursing associated ancillary services, such as research and business, in the physician practice area. Tucker has served as a nurse in the medical school team between 1971 and 1999. One hundred and three received conventional radiotherapy alone. Twenty-two patients received IMRT during treatment of nasal-passage cancer. They were treated at the University's Mallinckrodt Institute of Radiology (MIR). between 1971 and 1999. One hundred and three received conventional radiotherapy alone. Twenty-two patients received IMRT during treatment of nasal-passage cancer. They were treated at the University's Mallinckrodt Institute of Radiology (MIR).
Muses and the Healing Art • Evolving Body Applications • Lipid Trafficking

Exhibitions

"Architectonic Fixations: Photographs by


Community Contribution School of Art graduate student Brian Burnett with "Florescent Propinquity," which recently was unveiled at the new Children's Cardiogenics Development Center in the Central West End. Last semester, Burnett won a competition — and a $1,000 stipend — to design the piece, a tribute to Childguidance benefactors Craig and Connie Schmuck. Craig Schmuck is an University trustee. The center is jointly sponsored by Easter Seals and the St. Louis Association for Retarded Citizens.

Assistance

University to offer EAP beginning July 1

From Page 1

employee or their family members will work to clearly identify problems, the steps that can be taken to resolve the problems and other resources available to help with the problem. The EAP specializes with the employee or family member to develop a goal and will meet for up to five sessions to achieve the goal. If outside resources are required, the specialist will help the employee or family member find and contact the most appropriate resource and will follow up to ensure that the necessary assistance is received.

The University’s EAP program is based on confid-
Two University researchers in planetary sciences and director of the University’s McDonnell Center for the Space Sciences, “The region used to look like the rest of the highlands, but a vertical kilometer of material — enough to fill the Gulf of Mexico — has been eroded downslope and spread out into the northern plains.”

The researchers used high-resolution topographic data from the Mars Orbiter Laser Altimeter (MOLA) instrument on the Mars Global Surveyor mission to construct detailed maps of the planet’s surface. “Before this mission, topography was known only within a kilometer at best,” Hynek said. “Now we are able to determine valley networks and numerous erosional remnants.”

MOLA’s accuracy and the more than half-billion data points it has collected reveal many previously unknown features of Mars’ surface. The research was published in the November 25 issue of the Journal of Geophysical Research. Mars is divided into two main regions: the old Southern Highlands with lots of craters and valley networks, and the younger Northern Lowlands with fewer craters and no valley networks.

But the new topography reveals much more is going on than previously thought. Looking carefully at western Arabia, the researchers noticed that it differs from the rest of the highlands in having very few large craters, only a few traces of valley networks and numerous erosional remnants. “This combination makes it very likely that the entire region was swept away,” Hynek said.

But how can you remove all of these craters, Hynek said. “Winds is very effective on long timescales. Volcanoes, ice and glaciers can all erode features, but on this large of a scale these are clearly explanations.”

He said that the massive size of the eroded area and the remnants of valley networks suggest running water was responsible. The researchers believe the erosion event took place very early in Mars’ history, during the Late Noachian, and ended around 3.5 billion to 3.8 billion years ago. The timing coincides with other water features on the planet’s surface.

The researchers are now focusing attention on a large outcrop of hematite within western Arabia Terra, the Terra Meridiani region. Hematite, an iron oxide, forms in the presence of water on Earth. “This is very likely to be one of two Mars River landing sites in 2004,” Hynek said. “We want to go where the water was.”

WU researchers help shed light on origins of Earth

A collaborative effort involving Washington, Saint Louis and Peking university researchers has yielded a discovery near the Great Wall in China that could change the science of plate tectonics and provide some clues into how life might have developed on Earth.

The research, published as a report in the Mar 1, 11 issue of Science magazine, indicates that the Great Wall is far older than previously believed. For decades, geologists have argued against the theory that there are 2.5 billion years old and date back to Earth’s earliest geologic time period, known as the Archean. The rocks are remarkably similar to many volcanic rocks that erupted on the sea floor in the process of sea floor spreading.

For decades, geologists have debated whether plate tectonics operated in the Archean period. Those who have argued against that theory have cited the lack of any Archean volcanoes as their main line of evidence that plate tectonics did not occur. Scientists believe life on Earth began in this early period. Ophiolites are rock structures formed on the sea floor when oceanic crust on the Earth today developed, it’s possible that life developed and diversified around these vents as plate tectonics began,” Kusky said.

Kusky and Jiang-Hai Li of Peking University in Beijing made the discovery in a mountain belt in the Eastern Hebei provin–they evolved into more complex ecosystems by the early Archean. Ophiolites are rock structures formed on the sea floor when oceanic crust on the Earth today developed, it’s possible that life developed and diversified around these vents as plate tectonics began,” Kusky said.

Kusky and Jiang-Hai Li of Peking University in Beijing made the discovery in a mountain belt in the Eastern Hebei provin–they evolved into more complex ecosystems by the early Archean. Ophiolites are rock structures formed on the sea floor when oceanic crust on the Earth today developed, it’s possible that life developed and diversified around these vents as plate tectonics began,” Kusky said.
May 15
10:37 a.m. — An employee stated that between 2:7 p.m. and 3 a.m. on an unknown person entered her 1993 Honda Accord parked on Lot No. 10, and took her prescription sunglasses. No suspects or witnesses could be located. No sign of forced entry was found. Total loss is valued at $200.

May 22
3:25 p.m. — A staff member in Mallinckrodt Care Center stated that a person sold boats believed to be counterfeit between May 15-May 22. A wanted notice was placed in the police department. Total value of the boats is $89,319.

Heart
You move your hand to the right, the instrument tip defecets in the opposite direction. This fulcrum effect is counterintuitive and disorienting.

"Heart surgeons have steady hands, but it's impossible to hold long instruments steady when you are working on very small vessels," Damiano said. "The Zeus robotic system addresses many of these issues, filtration, filtration, filtration. It's easier to hold andream the digitally perfected movements to two instruments that are attached to the operating room table and hold specialized instrument tips. Simple voice commands control the robotic arm that held the video camera.

The surgeries were performed at Pennsylvania State University's Milton S. Hershey Medical Center. In all, 28 patients were enrolled in the study, 19 qualified for robotically assisted procedures.

May 21
159 p.m. — A student reported that his black backpack was stolen from the passenger side of his vehicle between 10-11 a.m. The case contained a laptop computer, his checkbook, a DVD, a law library book, headphones, a spare house key and miscellaneous items. Total loss is valued at $3,567.

Arts and Sciences
The following positions were recently reported to University Police May 5-June 9. Readers with information that could assist in investigating these incidents are urged to call 319-958-6500. This information is provided as a public service to promote safety awareness and is available on the University Police this web site - recovery.wustl.edu.

HIlltop Campus

A part of his goal to develop a new model in graduate education, the Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation has named WU and 13 other universities as the first round of collaborators in the foundation's new "Responsive Ph.D." initiative.

On Tuesday, graduate students from nine schools gathered at the University for a one-day meeting to launch this national project and brainstorm ideas.

Use the World Wide Web to obtain complete job descriptions. Go to https://hr.wusll.edu/ (Hilltop) or http://recovery.wustl.edu/ (Wustl). Employment.

Campus Watch

The following positions were recently reported to University Police May 5-June 9. Readers with information that could assist in investigating these incidents are urged to call 319-958-6500. This information is provided as a public service to promote safety awareness and is available on the University Police this web site - recovery.wustl.edu.

HIlltop Campus

A part of his goal to develop a new model in graduate education, the Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation has named WU and 13 other universities as the first round of collaborators in the foundation's new "Responsive Ph.D." initiative.

On Tuesday, graduate students from nine schools gathered at the University for a one-day meeting to launch this national project and brainstorm ideas.

Use the World Wide Web to obtain complete job descriptions. Go to https://hr.wusll.edu/ (Hilltop) or http://recovery.wustl.edu/ (Wustl). Employment.

Campus Watch

The following positions were recently reported to University Police May 5-June 9. Readers with information that could assist in investigating these incidents are urged to call 319-958-6500. This information is provided as a public service to promote safety awareness and is available on the University Police this web site - recovery.wustl.edu.

HIlltop Campus

A part of his goal to develop a new model in graduate education, the Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation has named WU and 13 other universities as the first round of collaborators in the foundation's new "Responsive Ph.D." initiative.

On Tuesday, graduate students from nine schools gathered at the University for a one-day meeting to launch this national project and brainstorm ideas.

Use the World Wide Web to obtain complete job descriptions. Go to https://hr.wusll.edu/ (Hilltop) or http://recovery.wustl.edu/ (Wustl). Employment.

Campus Watch

The following positions were recently reported to University Police May 5-June 9. Readers with information that could assist in investigating these incidents are urged to call 319-958-6500. This information is provided as a public service to promote safety awareness and is available on the University Police this web site - recovery.wustl.edu.

HIlltop Campus

A part of his goal to develop a new model in graduate education, the Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation has named WU and 13 other universities as the first round of collaborators in the foundation's new "Responsive Ph.D." initiative.

On Tuesday, graduate students from nine schools gathered at the University for a one-day meeting to launch this national project and brainstorm ideas.

Use the World Wide Web to obtain complete job descriptions. Go to https://hr.wusll.edu/ (Hilltop) or http://recovery.wustl.edu/ (Wustl). Employment.

Campus Watch

The following positions were recently reported to University Police May 5-June 9. Readers with information that could assist in investigating these incidents are urged to call 319-958-6500. This information is provided as a public service to promote safety awareness and is available on the University Police this web site - recovery.wustl.edu.

HIlltop Campus

A part of his goal to develop a new model in graduate education, the Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation has named WU and 13 other universities as the first round of collaborators in the foundation's new "Responsive Ph.D." initiative.

On Tuesday, graduate students from nine schools gathered at the University for a one-day meeting to launch this national project and brainstorm ideas.

Use the World Wide Web to obtain complete job descriptions. Go to https://hr.wusll.edu/ (Hilltop) or http://recovery.wustl.edu/ (Wustl). Employment.

Campus Watch

The following positions were recently reported to University Police May 5-June 9. Readers with information that could assist in investigating these incidents are urged to call 319-958-6500. This information is provided as a public service to promote safety awareness and is available on the University Police this web site - recovery.wustl.edu.

HIlltop Campus

A part of his goal to develop a new model in graduate education, the Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation has named WU and 13 other universities as the first round of collaborators in the foundation's new "Responsive Ph.D." initiative.

On Tuesday, graduate students from nine schools gathered at the University for a one-day meeting to launch this national project and brainstorm ideas.

Use the World Wide Web to obtain complete job descriptions. Go to https://hr.wusll.edu/ (Hilltop) or http://recovery.wustl.edu/ (Wustl). Employment.

Campus Watch

The following positions were recently reported to University Police May 5-June 9. Readers with information that could assist in investigating these incidents are urged to call 319-958-6500. This information is provided as a public service to promote safety awareness and is available on the University Police this web site - recovery.wustl.edu.

HIlltop Campus

A part of his goal to develop a new model in graduate education, the Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation has named WU and 13 other universities as the first round of collaborators in the foundation's new "Responsive Ph.D." initiative.

On Tuesday, graduate students from nine schools gathered at the University for a one-day meeting to launch this national project and brainstorm ideas.

Use the World Wide Web to obtain complete job descriptions. Go to https://hr.wusll.edu/ (Hilltop) or http://recovery.wustl.edu/ (Wustl). Employment.

Campus Watch

The following positions were recently reported to University Police May 5-June 9. Readers with information that could assist in investigating these incidents are urged to call 319-958-6500. This information is provided as a public service to promote safety awareness and is available on the University Police this web site - recovery.wustl.edu.

HIlltop Campus

A part of his goal to develop a new model in graduate education, the Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation has named WU and 13 other universities as the first round of collaborators in the foundation's new "Responsive Ph.D." initiative.

On Tuesday, graduate students from nine schools gathered at the University for a one-day meeting to launch this national project and brainstorm ideas.

Use the World Wide Web to obtain complete job descriptions. Go to https://hr.wusll.edu/ (Hilltop) or http://recovery.wustl.edu/ (Wustl). Employment.
Jim Burmeister accepts the fourth annual Gloria W. White Distinguished Service Award. (2001)

Staff day honors employees for service

The Staff Service Award and Recognition Ceremony May 2 honored 178 employees for their years of service to the University.

Those with 10 years of service received a chrome pen-and-pencil set; 20 years, a gold pen-and-pencil set; and 30 years, a gold watch bearing the University seal. Those with 50 years or more chose from a dozen items that included a vاسي, jewelry and luggage.

Vice Chancellor and Dean of the School of Arts & Sciences Seidensticker presented the award.

Those with 10 years of service received the Gloria W. White Distinguished Service Award.

The award, which includes $500, was established for Gloria White, who retired in 1997 as vice chancellor for development programs, and was given annually to an employee who has made exceptional effort and contributions to the betterment of the University.

For more information about recognition programs and contributions to the University, see the Washington People article in the May 30 Record at wuspr.wumail.wustl.edu.
Michael A. Kass, M.D., first came to the School of Medicine in the 1960s. He's not sure whether it was by chance or providence that he ended up here. He had decided on ophthalmology during medical school at Northwestern University, but he hadn't even considered coming to St. Louis for his residency. In fact, during a discussion with his adviser, Kass didn't even list the School of Medicine among his choices.

And his adviser, who was a neurologist, asked him, "Why aren't you going to visit Dr. Becker's program in St. Louis?" Even though he wasn't an ophthalmologist, he knew the reputation of the department here, and he said, "You definitely need to go down there and take a look."

"I can't really explain why, but I think all of my life, even from early childhood, I just would become a doctor," he said. "I don't believe I ever considered anything else."

Pursuing medicine

All through school, Kass did well in math and science. He went to the University of Michigan as a pre-med student. Then it was on to Northwestern for medical school, where he finally thought about what kind of doctor he would become. It wasn't an easy choice because the boy who had always wanted to be a doctor found that he enjoyed just about everything about medicine.

In fact, his ultimate choice of ophthalmology was based partly on the MACHosen assumption that it would somehow be easier to learn everything there was to know about ophthalmology than it would be to learn all about, say, internal medicine or neurology. "It seemed to me that I had been kidding myself," he said. "I couldn't learn all of ophthalmology, but I liked the idea that the field combined so many things. You could do diagnostic work as well as surgical treatments. These days, everybody in almost every field uses microscopes to operate, but in those days, ophthalmology was one of the first to use microsurgical techniques."

Interestingly, he liked the very fine, craftsman-like approach to surgery that ophthalmology offered.

But, "I'm the last person you would want on your car or fixing the plumbing in your house," Kass laughed. "I can change light bulbs, and I can do a few other simple things, but the dexterity I've learned doing microsurgery hasn't translated into other areas.

Keeping sense of humor

Kass laughs easily, especially at himself. When he takes his research and his position very seriously, he's not above a joke at his own expense. When he became head of ophthalmology in 1999, his longtime administrative assistant, Debbie Dunn, bought a small plate for his desk. It's engraved with the words "Michael A. Kass, M.D./Le Grand Frigidaire." It's a badge he displays proudly. Michael is quick to see the comedy in ironic and frustrating aspects of what we call "program," said Arthur H. Neufeld, Ph.D., the Bernard Becker Research Professor of Ophthalmology who has known Kass since his stint at Yale. "In the midst of a difficult discussion, he'll break the tension with a dry, humorous quip. He takes his work very seriously, but he doesn't take himself too seriously."

At first, he didn't even consider himself a serious candidate to head the department. Instead, he accepted an interim appointment, mainly out of a sense of duty. "I thought I owed it to the department to provide some stability and leadership for an interim time," he said. "If I could, I should do that. That was my original intent."

"Only after doing the job for a while did he find he enjoyed the challenges. That's when he entered his own name into the search for a chair. As with any job, things can occasionally get frustrating, and some days he wonders about that decision. But his mentor, Bernard Becker, has no doubts."

"When the previous chairman left, a search committee reviewed and spoke to the people in the country about replacing him," Becker said. "But they found out that we already had the best guy right here. And I couldn't agree more."