Medical News: Exercise lovers colon cancer risk

Investment in science Missouri Sen. Claire McCaskill speaks to reporters about the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act's impact in Missouri in the lobby of Whitaker Hall Feb. 21. The act, among other features, provides more than $10 billion in additional federal grant money for science research. Chancellor Mark S. Wrighton (left) said WUSTL was "well positioned to compete for the additional funds and to put them to work immediately and wisely." Also speaking at-to the second from left) Pat Sullivan of the Home Builders Association; Betty Van Uum, assistant to the provost for public affairs and economic development at the University of Missouri-St. Louis; Anthony Thompson, president and CEO of Kewa Building Group Inc.; Larry J. Shapira, M.D., executive vice chancellor for medical affairs and dean of the School of Medicine; and Marcia Millitz, president and CEO of the Center for Emerging Technologies.

Stressbusters: New program to feature five-minute backrubs

Washington People: Bierut studies addiction and the brain

Spectator named dean of art in Sam Fox School of Design & Visual Arts

BY CYNTHIA GEORGES

Franklin "Buzz" Spector, professor and former chair of the Department of Art at Cornell University in Ithaca, N.Y., has been named dean of the College and Graduate School of Art in the Sam Fox School of Design & Visual Arts. Spector also will hold the Jane Reuter Hitzeman and Herbert F. Hitzeman Jr. Professorship of Art.

The appointment, effective July 1, was announced by Carmen Colangelo, dean of the Sam Fox School and the Eid. Desmond Lee Professor for Collaboration in the Arts.

An internationally recognized artist and critical writer, Spector works in a wide range of mediums including sculpture, photography, printmaking, book arts and installation. He joined the Department of the College of Architecture, Art and Planning at Cornell University in 2001 and served as chair of the department until 2007.

Prior to that, he taught at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, joining the faculty as professor of art in 1994 and serving as head of the painting program from 1997-2001.

Spector has held visiting professorships and scholarships at a number of universities and schools of art, including the University of California's campuses at Los Angeles, Riverside and Santa Barbara; California State University, Fullerton; Art Center College of Design in Pasadena, Calif.; and the School of the Art Institute of Chicago.

"Buzz brings great energy and breadth of experience to Washington University as an academic leader and an internationally recognized artist, writer and art critic," Colangelo said.

EST celebrates 30 years of helping campus

BY NEIL SCHNEIDER

Starting in 1979 by a handful of students carrying first-aid equipment in their backpacks, the University's Emergency Support Team (EST) now boasts 53 members, a fully loaded Ford Explorer, several trained emergency medical technicians and a long list of satisfied patients.

EST, a student-run volunteer organization operated under the auspices of the Habitat Health & Wellness Program, is celebrating its 30th year on the Danforth Campus.

What began as a humble attempt to assuage concerns over the response time of emergency medical crews from the St. Louis metropolitan region has turned into a 24-hour, seven-days-a-week emergency medical squad capable of assisting in cases from sprained ankles to heart attacks and stroke.

EST began in 1979 as SHOUT (Student Helping OUT) and consisted of 20 students and staff with varying amounts of emergency medical training. They were dispatched via University Police and responded in a golf cart equipped with trauma kits, oxygen tanks and ice packs.

Over the years, the group has evolved into a well-organized and well-trained group of dedicated students. With a home office in Lien House in the North 40, EST offers CPR classes to the community and a reduced cost and free room instruction and approximately 50 hours of hands-on training in ambulances and the field.

Senior Andrew Mullin, a biology major in Arts & Sciences, has enjoyed working with EST during his college career.

"Over the past two years, I've been able to teach and train younger, newer medics, which is a lot of fun," Mullin said. "It's great to be able to pass along the knowledge I've gained as part of this team. I think that's a reason we've been so successful. The older medics love taking time to mentor the younger class, so we are able to maintain high-quality service year after year."

The responding crew consists of at least five volunteer EMTs and a third member who is at least CPR and first-aid certified. In becoming an EMT, students receive 188 hours of class room instruction and approximately 50 hours of hands-on training in ambulances and the field.

Spectator, Page 2

See Surgery, Page 2

Surgery, Page 2

Less invasive glaucoma surgery allows faster return to normal activity

BY JIM DRYDEN

Surgeons at the Washington University Eye Center and Barnes-Jewish Hospital are among the first to use a new surgical device to treat glaucoma.

Surgery with the device, called a Trabectome, is an outpatient procedure that takes less time to perform and offers a shorter recovery than traditional glaucoma surgery.

The device reduces pressure in the eye without the need for the filtration or shunts used in traditional glaucoma surgery by allowing surgeons to remove tissue so fluid more easily drains out of the eye.

"Glaucoma surgery typically redirects fluid so that it no longer builds up inside the eye," said Carla J. Siegfried, M.D., associate professor of ophthalmology and visual sciences. "The surgeon creates a new space where fluid can flow and then it is slowly reabsorbed by the eye. Less fluid building up in the eye means lower pressure in the eye."

But traditional glaucoma surgery has meant several weeks before a patient fully recovers.

During this time, the patient can't do any heavy lifting or bending, and there are long-term risks of infection. With the new procedure, patients usually resume normal activity after about a week.

"The benefit of the new procedure is that we're draining fluid from the eye in a more physiological way," Siegfried said. "Rather than creating a new drainage pathway, we're utilizing what nature gave us, and, in that way, it has less risk, takes less time and offers quicker recovery."

In glaucoma patients, the optic nerve is damaged — that nerve brings information from the eye to the brain. In most cases, pressure from fluid inside the eye is the main culprit in that damage. Lowering eye pressure is the focus of treatment.

But traditional glaucoma surgery has many more 4 million Americans, but according to the Glaucoma Research Foundation, only half are aware of it. Typically, it has no symptoms and left undiagnosed can lead to severe vision loss and blindness. A comprehensive eye exam is the best way to screen for glaucoma.

Siegfried and Barnett began using the Trabectome in 2007. Now they train other glaucoma specialists how to use the device.

Not all glaucoma patients are good candidates for the device. Those with more advanced disease and patients with certain subtypes of glaucoma will benefit from more traditional types of surgery, Siegfried said. She said patients in the early to moderate stages of the disease are the best candidates. The new procedure also is an option for glaucoma.

See Surgery, Page 2

Siegfried Barnett, Page 2
Spector will lead "pre-eminent center for arts education"—from Page 1

"He is an outstanding and dedicated teacher who will make substantial contributions to the new curriculum and provide leadership in the development of both undergraduate and graduate programs at the undergraduate and graduate levels," Colangelo said. Spector said he looked forward to joining the University. "I’ve admired the commitment to the Washington University in St. Louis for many years and have lectured and critiqued student work there in the past," Spector said. "Indeed, several undergraduate students of mine later received their MFAs from Washington University, where the rigor of the design and art studios helped them to significantly expand their critical and creative horizons. I looked forward to expanding my own sense of the field, and in multiple contexts, as a colleague at Washington University." Spector said.

Spector’s appointment follows from the work of an advisory committee co-chaired by Patricia L. Olynyk, the Florence and Frank O. Behnken, Ph.D. chairman of the profession, also included a scavenger "golden mouse" hunt throughout the engineering school, pocket bicycle racing, an undergraduate student research fair, laser tag in Lopata Gallery and an address by WUSTL St. Louis and NASA astronaut Robert Behnken, Ph.D.

century contemporary creative practices and culture through new and innovative educational pendulums. "With the Sam Fox School, Washington University is creating a pre-eminent center for art education in the country," Wallace said. "Buzz Spector, with his distinguished track record of interdisciplinary collaboration, has the vision to lead the College of Art in this exciting endeavor." Spector succeeds Ron Leax, the Halsey Coeley Ives Professor of Art, who will have completed his one-year appointment as dean June 30. Prior to Leax, Jeff Pike, professor of art, served as dean from 1999-2008.

"We are deeply grateful to Ron Leax for serving so effectively as dean of art following Jeff Pike’s tenancy," Colangelo said. "This steadfast work on the accreditation process of the National Association of Schools of Art and Design and in all areas of the program has been phenomenal." A native of Chicago, Spector earned a bachelor’s degree in art from Southern Illinois University Carbondale in 1972 and a master of fine arts degree from the Committee of Art and Design at the University of Chicago in 1978, combining studies in art and philosophy. Spector’s work makes frequent use of the book, both as subject and as object, and concerns the relationships among public history, individual memory and perception. He has issued a number of artists’ books and editions since the mid-1970s, including “Time Square,” a letterpress limited-edition book published in 2007 at Arizona State University in Tempe.

Other publications include “Details: closed to open” (2001), an artist’s book of photographic details from images in the Swarthmore College Peace Collection, an archive of historical and contemporary information related to peace and social justice, and “Beautiful Scene: Selections from the Crocker Archive” (1998). Spector’s work has been shown in numerous museums and galleries, among them the Art Institute of Chicago, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, the Corcoran Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C., the Museum of Fine Art in Pittsburgh, and the Luigi Pucci Center for Contemporary Art in Porto, Italy. Spector is a co-founder of WhiteWalls, a journal of art and language first published in 1977 at the University of Chicago. He served as the journal’s editor until 1987 and since then has written extensively on topics in contemporary art and culture for American Craft, Artforum, Art Issues, Dialogue, Exposure, New Art Examiner and Visions.

He is the author of “The Book Maker’s Desire” (1995), critical essays on topics in contemporary art and artists’ books, and numerous exhibition catalogue essays, including “Dieter Roth” (1999, University of Iowa Museum of Art) and “Ann Hamilton: Sao Paulo — Seattle” (1992, University of Washington Press). The recipient of several awards and fellowships, Spector was honored with an Artist’s Fellowship from the New York Foundation for the Arts (1991); a Louis Comfort Tiffany Foundation Award (1994), a Visual Artist’s Fellowship from the Illinois Arts Council (1980) and three fellowship awards from the National Endowment for the Arts (1981, 1985 and 1982). Buzz will make an excellent dean who will lead the College and Graduate School of Art to achieve even greater success and distinction and will help the Sam Fox School realize our vision and goals," Colangelo said.

Urban historian Gordon to speak on St. Louis’ transformation—from Page 1

BY JESSICA MARTIN

Ohio Gordon, Ph.D., professor of history at the University of Iowa, will speak on the “Transformation of Metropolitan St. Louis in the 20th Century” at 4 p.m. Thursday, Feb. 5, in Brown Hall Lounge.

Gordon is the author of the 2008 book, “Mapping Decline: St. Louis and the Fate of the American City.” Using both conventional archival research and digital mapping of a range of archival, demographic and political data, the book traces the transformation of metropolitan St. Louis in the 20th century. Gordon’s lecture is part of the George Washington School of Social Work’s ongoing lecture series, which brings speakers from around the world to discuss a range of social policy issues.

The talk is free and open to the public. For more information, call Terri Behr at 935-6630.

Surgery

Recovery is rapid with this procedure— from Page 1

patients having cataract surgery who want to reduce the number of glaucoma medications they use. All of the levels of the disease that allows us to use this procedure in certain patients," Siegfried said.

"Those who do this procedure are very happy because the recovery is so rapid, but it’s not for everyone, and it doesn’t treat glaucoma. At this time, there is no cure. Our goal is to control it, to preserve vision and to prevent further damage. For more information about the procedure, contact Siegfried at the Washington University Eye Center at 362-3937.
School of Medicine Update

People who exercise lower their risk of colon cancer

By GWEN ERICSON

A n ambitious new study has added considerable weight to the claim that exercise can lower the risk for colon cancer.

Researchers at the School of Medicine and Harvard University combined and analyzed several decades worth of data from past studies on how exercise affects colon cancer risk. They found that people who exercised the most were 24 percent less likely to develop the disease than those who exercised the least.

"What's really compelling is that we see the association between exercise and lower colon cancer risk regardless of how physical activity was measured in the studies," said lead study author Kathleen Y. Wolin, Sc.D., assistant professor of surgery. "That indicates this is a robust association and adds considerable weight to the claim that exercise can lower the risk for colon cancer.

There is an ever-growing body of evidence related to the effect of exercise on colon cancer risk. In all, they analyzed 52 studies going back as far as 1984, making their analysis the most comprehensive to date.

They found that the protective effect of exercise held for all types of physical activity, whether that activity was recreational, such as jogging, biking or swimming, or job-related, such as walking, lifting or digging.

"The beneficial effect of exercise holds across all sorts of activities," said Wolin, a cancer prevention and control expert with the NCI's Division of Cancer Control and Population Sciences.

"And it holds for both men and women. There is an ever-growing body of evidence that the behavior choices we make affect our cancer risk. Physical activity is at the top of the list of ways that you can reduce your risk of colon cancer," Wolin said.

The findings also showed that people who were the most physically active and those who were less physically active were having a reduced risk of colon cancer.

"One of the callers, a man in his 50s on dialysis, said his blood type did not match any friends that he had, and his only option for a new kidney was to wait for someone to find a donor," Rickert said. "I started researching the risks of donating a kidney and realized that they were small compared to the great need for donation."

Rickert determined that the risks of surgery, bleeding and infection, are similar to those involved with any major surgery. He also found that kidney donation does not change expectancy or increase a person's risks of developing kidney disease or other health problems.

Rickert's parents and sister were a little taken aback when he brought up donating, but they eventually came around.

"Chuck is the first student to ever come to me and say they want to donate a kidney," said her father, Chuck Rickert. "It's a truly selfless act and the entire family is supportive of his decision." Chuck Rickert's kidney was a transplant success and the recipient is doing well.

Rickert also is a teaching assistant in the first-year physiology course. Coursemaster Robert D. Schreiber, Ph.D., is a transplant surgeon at Barnes-Jewish Hospital and the recipient of Rickert's kidney.

"I can't say enough. It's been deeply meaningful for him," Rickert's mother said.

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Kingsbury Ensemble to feature natural horn player R.J. Kelley

The Kingsbury Ensemble, one of the leading early music ensembles, will present a concert of Classical and early Romantic works for natural horn, soprano and fortepiano at 8 p.m. March 5 in Degenhardt Hall of the Center for the Performing Arts. This event will be part of the Department of Music's Armchair Music Series.

On Wednesday, March 4, the Department of Music and the Kingsbury Ensemble will co-sponsor a lecture-demonstration on the natural horn by Kelley. The event, free and open to the public, will take place at 5 p.m. in the Recital Hall of the 560 Music Center and will present a unique opportunity to learn more about the instrument.

Kelley, who is also the director of the horn program at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music, has performed with the New York Philharmonic, San Francisco Symphony, and Cleveland Orchestra, among others. He has recorded CD's of music by Mozart, Beethoven and Schubert on fortepiano. Kelley is also a member of the Kingsbury Ensemble.

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Nanoscience pioneer Alivisatos to deliver Compton lecture

By Mary Kastens

Alivisatos has gained worldwide recognition for his pioneering work in the creation of nanocrystals and for being used as tracers that, depending on size, emit light of different colors.

On Stage

Music

Buder Center to take part in Native American forum March 4

BY JESSICA MARTIN

Shakers from the Kathryn M. Buder Center for American Indian Affairs at the George Warren Brown School of Social Work will take part in a community awareness forum at 6:30 p.m. Wednesday, March 4, at the Schluich Branch of the St. Louis Public Library. The forum, "Native Voices: Unveiling the Myths behind the Headress, Moccasins and Nature and Science," in the private sector, he is founder and editor of the journal Nano Letters, a journal of the American Chemical Society, as well as the scientific founder of the Quantum Dot Corp. He has helped launch several successful nanotech startups and has mentored dozens of young nanoresearchers.

Alivisatos earned a bachelor's degree in chemistry from the University of California, Berkeley, in 1986. After postdoctoral work at AT&T Bell Labs, he joined the faculty at the University of California, Berkeley, in 1990. He is the Larry and Dianne Bloch Professor of Nanoscience and holds a joint appointment as professor in the departments of chemistry and materials science. In addition, he is the associate lab director for physical sciences and director of the materials sciences division at the Lawrence Berkeley National Lab. The lecture is free and open to the public.

For more information, call 935-4620 or visit the assemblies.wsu.edu.

Women's basketball wins UAA title

The No. 11 women's basketball team clinched the University Athletic Association (UAA) championship, picking up the conference's automatic bid to the NCAA tournament with a pair of victories last weekend.

Four players scored in double figures as the Bears defeated the University of Rochester 22-19, 12-19, and 9-19, and the UAA championship. With a 65-52 win and the UAA championship, the Bears will be making their 20th consecutive appearance in the NCAA tournament and head Coach Nancy Fahey told 20 marks in a season for the 19th time in her WUSTL career.

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Sean Wailla plays his last home game Saturday.

Swimmers get one last chance to qualify

The men's and women's swimming teams each have one chance to qualify for the NCAA championships with a pair of meets this weekend.

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Sports

W.J.T. Mitchell, the Gaylord Donnelley Cultural Icon

By Patrick Cerone

On Stage

Record.wustl.edu

Wednesday, March 4

8 p.m. Student Recital. Recital Hall, 560 Trinity Ave. 935-5566.

The story of visual and verbal representations in the context of social and political issues.

The centerpiece of the interdisciplinary journal Critical Inquiry, a quarterly on art and human sciences. Special issues have focused on public art, psychoanalysis, pluralism, feminism, the sociology of literature, cance and identity, narrative, the politics of interpretation and postcolonial theory, among other topics.

His collection of essays titled "What Do Pictures Want?" won the Association for Art History's prestigious James Russell Lowell Prize in 2005. In 2005, he received the University of Chicago's prestigious Faculty Award for "Excellence in Graduate Teaching."

A reception for Mitchell will begin at 6 p.m. For more information, call 935-4535 or visit kenspermuwseu.wustl.edu.

Sports

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**Student book collectors can win cash prizes**

Students who have a passion for collecting books can compete for prizes of $1,000 or $500 by entering the Neureuther Student Book Collection Essay Competition. The competition offers prizes of $1,000 or $500 by Neureuther competition offers

**Volunteers sought to help with college exam prep**

BY NEIL SCHOENBERG

The Each One Teach One (EOTO) program, which connects WUSTL tutors with area schoolchildren in need of academic support, is adding an extra component.

Starting in March, WUSTL volunteers will help students at Gateway and Seldon high schools in St. Louis prepare for Advanced Placement (AP) exams in calculus and English language and composition. The AP program allows students to take college-level courses in high school and earn college credits.

Volunteers will participate in weekly meetings at Gateway and Seldon high schools on Monday nights from 3:30 to 5 p.m. Each volunteer will be assigned to a group of two or three high school students at a time. Volunteers will be responsible for working with the students during the assigned time slot.

Volunteers will need to attend at least two training sessions prior to the start of the program and are required to commit to coaching for the complete four-week period.

Volunteers will be paired with a group of 30-50 students. Each volunteer will be responsible for one group, and will work with the same group of students throughout the process.

Volunteers will be given a training session prior to the start of the program, where they will be introduced to the program and its goals. Volunteers will also be provided with a detailed schedule of the program, which includes weekly meetings and preparation sessions.

**Emergency Notification System to be tested March 2**

Washington University will test its Emergency Notification System (WUSTL-ENS) on Monday, March 2. The test will be held in conjunction with St. Louis County's monthly siren test, which occurs at 11 a.m. on the first Monday of each month.

The WUSTL-ENS test will take place unless there is the potential for severe weather that day or some other emergency occurring at that time.

For the test, WUSTL-ENS will send test and voice messages to all cell phones and e-mails at wustl.edu.

The University also will notify the community via the emergency Web site (emergency.wustl.edu) and an emergency hotline (935-9000 locally or toll-free 888-234-2863).

WUSTL community members are strongly encouraged to register their cell phone numbers with the University so they can receive emergency text and voice messages on their cell phones. To sign up, visit emergency.wustl.edu.

Text messaging has proved to be an effective and efficient way to reach members of a university community in a crisis," said Matt Arthur, director of Public Affairs and Community Relations.

WUSTL installed warning sirens on the roofs of Brookings Hall and Seigle Hall Jan. 5. A third siren will be installed on a building in the South 40 this spring.

For more information about WUSTL-ENS, contact Mark Bagby, University disaster coordinator, at bagbyem@wustl.edu.
received the grant, titled "Super- TIGER: A Very-Large-Area High-Resolution Trans-Iron Cosmic-ray Detector." The Super-TIGER is designed to measure the abundances of the ultra-heavy cosmic ray nuclei — nucleis of atoms heavier than nickel.

When constructed, it will be four times larger than the size of a pool table — the previous TIGER experiment that was successfully flown twice for a total of 50 days over Antarctica — once during a flight launched in December 2003 and another launched in December 2004. Like Super-TIGER, TIGER also was supported by NASA and built in Washington University's cosmic ray astrophysics laboratory. Those flights, also in search of the origin of cosmic rays, is planned for December 2006.

However, binns, higher statistics measurements are needed to confirm this conclusion and to better understand the mechanism by which elements found in interstellar dust grains are accelerated more efficiently than those found in the flight launched March 2003.

"The Super-TIGER experiment will be able to collect about 10 times as many particles as the TIGER experiment, enabling us to make precise abundance measurements of these very rare, heavy nuclei," said binns, who is principal investigator.

"These measurements will enable us to test the emerging large aperture model of cosmic ray origin in the context of massive stars," binns said.

Martin H. Israel, Ph.D., professor of physics and astronomy, and associate professor with binns on both Super-TIGER and the previous TIGER instruments, said that the study of galactic cosmic rays will lead to a better understanding of their origin and the explosive processes involved in the process of creating the universe's life." 

A consortium of scientists, engineers, technicians and graduate students have been working together on TIGER — most recently on data analysis — and the same research groups will be developing Super-TIGER.

The researchers are from WUSTL, which is the principal institution, with contributions from the Los Alamos National Laboratory, the Jet Propulsion Laboratory, and the University of Minnesota. Washington University, the other WUSTL investigators are Binns, Trammel, and the high-energy astrophysics group in the Department of Physics and the McDonnell Center for the Space Sciences.

Grant memorial service to be held March 7

A memorial service for Neville Grant, M.D., graduate of the Medical School of the University of London, will be held March 7 at 1 p.m. in Graham Chapel. A reception will follow in the Formal Lounge on the second floor of the Washington University Student Center.

Graham, a native of London, was born in 1938.

In his work with the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, Graham was the principal investigator in the study of the effects of smoking on angina pectoris. He died in 1981.

"Neville was a remarkable person who had a profound impact on the field of medicine," said his long-time colleague, Dr. John M. Grant, who was a fellow at the National Institutes of Health in the early 1980s.

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Untangling addiction’s roots

Bierut tackles brain’s role in psychiatric illness

Laura Bierut and her husband, Brad Evanoff, with their daughters Tate Bierut (left) and Tasha Evanoff on vacation in Hawaii.

Born in Chicago, the youngest of three girls, Laura Jean Bierut, M.D., got her early exposure to medicine from her moth- er, Lillian, a nurse.

"On Girl Scout camps, she always had to go along because they wanted a nurse with us," Bierut says. "She also would go to the schools on days when they would line everybody up for vac- cines with those little 'pens' that gave you the shot and TB test." Bierut’s grandparents migrated from Chicago to Poland, and they never let their progeny forget about the many opportunities afforded people in the United States.

"My grandmother couldn’t read or write, and so in the first generation born here, were always very aware of how lucky they were to get an education and live in this country," she says. "My mom became a nurse, and my dad went through school on the GI Bill after World War II. He became an accountant. They placed a high value on education.

So they were thrilled when Bierut, now a professor of psychia- try, was accepted at Harvard University. But they also were apprehensive about her moving to the East Coast. Although her graduate students had benefited from the world- wide resources Harvard had, they had never seen so far away. Laura Bierut and her husband, Brad Evanoff, with their daughters

"The downside was that it was 1962. Lesh Wilesen and fellow workers had organized strikes in the shipyards and launched the workers had organized strikes in the earlier. The Polish government had dentists of Polish origin to visit Poland. She would study and learn biochemistry and molecular biology. She took entrance exams for Jagiellonian University. But they also were apprehensive about her moving to the East Coast. Although her graduate students had benefited from the world- wide resources Harvard had, they had never seen so far away. Laura Bierut and her husband, Brad Evanoff, with their daughters

"It was a cultural immersion experience. We had to get our British accent back. But there were no TV sets in Warsaw, to Warsaw, in Krakow. I wrote letters and sent telegrams that week.

She also learned Polish, but mostly, she says, she was remind- ed about the gift of good fortune.

"What that year really taught me was to thank God my grand- parents came to the United States," she says. "I had so many opportunities, and I saw firsthand that most kids there didn’t. That has changed in recent years, but in those days, things were fairly bleak.

She did return to the United States for one year that week to interview for medical school and, and the following fall, she be- came a student at the School of Medicine.

Genetics of behavior

As a medical student, Bierut says, "I had no idea what I wanted to do, and I loved everything." She eventually chose psychiatry after getting advice from the late Samuel B. Gau, M.D., the former head of the department and vice chancellor for medical affairs.

"He told me to think about what I would love doing in the long run, in 10 or 20 years," she says. "He said we all were blessed with so many skills and so many resources and an incredible edu- cation that it would be a shame not to do what you loved."

Bierut decided she loved psychiatry. For one thing, psychi- atric illnesses involved the brain. They also had the capacity to devastate people’s lives, and there were lots of opportunities in the growing field of psychiatry research.

"She says it was good advice, and she made the right choice," Charles F. Zorumski, M.D., the Samuel B. Gau Professor of psychiatry and head of psychiatry, agrees. "Laura is a great colleague and mentor," Zorumski says. "She's very approachable and has a very high level of respect for her research and her group.

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In the long run, in 10 or 20 years, she will be slightly more advanced in understanding genetic risks and tailoring treatments to individuals, but she believes psychiatry will get there.

"We’re addressing questions like, ‘What makes us human?’" she says. "It’s not just within our brains. It’s in our thoughts. And psychiatric illnesses can be so devastating to people that basic aspects of our human- ity in some ways, figuring out why a person becomes alcoholic or gets hooked on cigarettes or becomes

Laura Bierut, M.D. (left), and Sarah Hartz, M.D., psychiatric resident, discuss data in the lab. “Laura is a great colleague and mentor,” says Charles Zorumski, M.D., the Samuel B. Gau Professor and head of psychiatry. "Her group is untangling the contributions of specific genes and environmental influences on these disorders, and she is clearly at the forefront of her field."

Bioff and Evanrunt

In addition to hunting for genes and speaking Polish, Bierut plays the violin. Evanoff plays the saxophone and a few other wind instruments. Their daughters are musical, too. "There are many bicycles, too. We tan- dem as a family."

Bierut and Evanoff have two daughters: Tasha Evanoff is 15. Her sister, Tate, Bierut is 12.

"We thought of using Bieoff or Evanrat, but those just didn’t sound right," she says.

In addition to bicycling with their parents — the family spends a week each June cover- ing the entire 225-mile length of the Kearsarge Trail across Missouri — and playing music, both girls also speak French. A few years ago, Bierut and Evanoff took their family, and their family members, got detailed information about their symptoms and collected their DNA.

Gene chips, rapid sequencing and other techniques have made the study of behavior and genetics much different now than it was when Bierut entered the field.

But her group continues to study the DNA samples collected almost 20 years ago, applying techniques that were only dreamt of when those samples first were stored. They are learning about genes and risk for illness and addiction.

In psychiatric illnesses, there is so much interplay between genes and environment that understanding how genes work, and what happens when they don’t, is only a fraction of the story.

In some ways, she believes other branches of medicine may be slightly more advanced in understanding genetic risks and tailoring treatments to individuals, but she believes psychiatry will get there.

"We’re addressing questions like, ‘What makes us human?’" she says. "It’s not just within our brains. It’s in our thoughts. And psychiatric illnesses can be so devastating to people that basic aspects of our human- ity in some ways, figuring out why a person becomes alcoholic or gets hooked on cigarettes or becomes schizophrenia involves some of the most important questions we face in medicine.”

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