Scratch no more:  
Gene for itch sensation discovered  
By GWIN ERICKSON

itching for a better anti-itch remedy? Your wish may soon be granted now that School of Medicine scientists have identified the first gene for the itch sensation in the central nervous system. The discovery could rapidly lead to treatments directly targeting itchiness and providing relief for chronic and severe itching. The "itch gene" is GRPR (generalized-tract releasing peptide receptor), which codes for a receptor found in a very small population of spinal cord nerve cells where pain and itch signals are transmitted from the skin to the brain. The new researchers, led by Zheng-Feng Chen, Ph.D., found that laboratory mice that lacked this gene scratched much less than their normal cage-mates when given itchy stimuli. The laboratory experiments confirmed the connection between GRPR and itching, offering the first evidence of a receptor specific for the itch sensation in the central nervous system. The findings were reported in late July in the online version of Nature.

A widespread problem, chronic itching can be a serious side effect of cancer therapies or powerful painkillers like morphine. For some people, chronic itching can be very intense, interfering with sleep or giving rise to scratching that leads to scarring. Effective treatment options for itching are limited. Historically, scientists regarded itch as just a less intense version of the pain sensation. As a result, research on itching has been somewhat neglected. "Many genes have been identified in the pain pathway," said Chen, associate professor of anesthesiology, of psychiatry in Arts & Sciences and of molecular biology and pharmacology. "But itch research has lived in the shadow of pain research, and no one knew which gene was responsible for itching in the brain or the spinal cord until now."

In fact, Chen's team became interested in GRPR because it was looking for genes in the pain pathway. Among potential pain-sensing genes the team identified, GRPR stood out because it is present in only a few nerve cells in the skin known to relay pain and/or itch signals to the brain.

So the team began to study some mice that lacked the GRPR gene to find out how they were different from normal mice.

"The research was a little disappointing at first," Chen said. "The knockout mice seemed to have the same reactions to painful stimuli as normal mice."

But when post-doctoral fellow Yan-Gang Sun, Ph.D., injected the spinal cords of normal mice with a substance that stimulates GRPR, the nerve cells scrambled themselves as if they had a bad itch.

"That's when we thought the gene might be involved in the itch sensation," Chen said.

The team studied scratching behavior in two sets of mice—normal mice and GRPR knockout mice. Normal mice scratched vigorously when exposed to a variety of itchy-producing substances, but the knockout mice scratched much less.

The fact that the knockout mice still scratched a little suggests there are additional itch receptors, Chen said. "We know of some proteins that are similar to GRPR."
School of Medicine Update

Adverse housing conditions contribute to diabetes risk

BY JON DREVER

Studying people in their homes and neighborhoods, investigators have found that poor housing conditions contribute to the risk for diabetes in urban, middle-aged African-Americans.

A team of researchers from the School of Medicine, Indiana University School of Medicine and other institutions conducted the study and published their findings in the Aug. 15 issue of the American Journal of Public Health Research. "And we found that housing conditions somehow contribute to the development of diabetes."

The study looked at several risk factors for diabetes including weight, smoking, exercise, alcohol use, marital status and education. But when the researchers adjusted for all of those factors, housing conditions still influenced diabetes risk.

"So far we can't explain why that is," Schootman said. "It could potentially be related to lead. Lead is associated with diabetes, but not neighborhoods." He would have expected that if stress was playing a role, the neighborhood conditions also would be involved.

The researchers found that although there were no associations with neighborhood conditions, sub-standard housing more than doubled diabetes risk. The two neighborhoods studied were a poor, inner-city area and a less impoverished, suburban area that included several pockets of residents from a variety of socioeconomic backgrounds.

Interviewers spoke to participants in their homes. They gathered data about health status, access to medical care and demographic characteristics, but they also were trained to look for certain things in neighborhoods and houses.

They rated neighborhoods on noise, air quality and the conditions of houses, streets, yards and sidewalks. Broken windows, bad siding, cracks in the sidewalks and nearby industrial sites or traffic noise lowered a neighborhood's rating. Houses were rated on cleanliness inside of the building and the physical condition of the building's interior and exterior, as well as the condition of the furnishings in the building. Neighborhoods and houses then were classified as fair, poor, good or excellent.

"It's not clear exactly how housing conditions are exerting this influence," said senior author Douglas K. Miller, M.D., M.D., and his colleagues at the School of Medicine and at other institutions revealed that improved energy production in human muscle may underlie heart failure in some patients with high blood pressure.

The researchers say that a molecular factor involved in maintaining the heart's energy supply could become key to new approaches to prevent or treat heart failure.

The molecular factor, a protein called estrogen-related receptor alpha (ERR alpha), helps the heart keep up with energy-demanding conditions like high blood pressure, which makes the heart work harder to pump blood.

In the July issue of Cell Metabolism, Kelly and his colleagues report that mice born without any ERR alpha develop symptoms of heart failure when their hearts were forced to pump against high pressure. The hearts of normal mice that lack pressure overload in stride and didn't contract effectively, researchers observed signs of early heart failure: The mouse hearts dilated and didn't contract effectively, the heart walls thinned, fibrous tissue developed and didn't contract effectively, the heart walls thinned, fibrous tissue developed and didn't contract effectively, the heart walls thinned, fibrous tissue developed and didn't contract effectively, the heart walls thinned, fibrous tissue developed and didn't contract effectively, the heart walls thinned, fibrous tissue developed and didn't contract effectively, the heart walls thinned, fibrous tissue developed and didn't contract effectively, the heart walls thinned, fibrous tissue developed and didn't contract effectively, the heart walls thinned, fibrous tissue developed and didn't contract effectively, the heart walls thinned, fibrous tissue developed and didn't contract effectively, the heart walls thinned, fibrous tissue developed and didn't contract effectively.

"I think that's a huge finding in and of itself," Schootman said. "Think about how many middle-aged African-Americans live in a place like St. Louis, and if our sample is at all representative of the larger community, you can see that the number of people with diabetes is growing very rapidly over time. I also think it's likely that we would find comparable results if we had done similar research in Detroit, Atlanta or New York City."

Schootman said more studies will be needed to determine what specifically in the risk of developing diabetes in poor housing conditions, but many factors have already been ruled out.

High blood pressure, how energy equal a recipe for heart failure

BY GWEN ERICSON

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Recurring program grows at the School of Medicine

By Beth Miller

Project ARK receives $6.7 million to provide HIV care to women, children

Project ARK, the St. Louis area's only organization that coordinates care, support and prevention services for children and women facing HIV and or social support services when they enter the program,” said Gregory Storch, M.D., medical director of Project ARK and the Ruth L. Stricker. "We are very happy to receive this grant as it will enable us to address the needs of newly enrolling individuals and their families while continuing to provide optimum services to existing clients," said Gregory Storch, M.D., medical director of Project ARK and the Ruth L. Stricker. "Last year, we had more than 100 new HIV-infected clients in the program. These individuals often have a high level of need for social support services when they enter the program," said Storch. Also director of the Division of Infectious Diseases at St. Louis Children's Hospital.

The federal Ryan White program is named after an Indiana teenager whose own struggle with AIDS and AIDS-related dementia helped educate the nation. Ryan White died in 1990, the same year the program was enacted. For low-income, uninsured AIDS patients, the Ryan White Act also provides access to HIV drugs, including protease inhibitors that are known to slow the spread of HIV, as well as general medical services, such as case management and dental care.

Project ARK also receives funding from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Ryan White Parts A and B and private foundations. It was founded by the Ryan White Act since 1995.

Acceptable items for the commingled containers:
- Steel cans and tin (empty and rinsed)
- Soda, water and flavored-beverage bottles (empty and rinsed)
- Yogurt cups (empty and rinsed)
- Glass bottles and jars, clear, brown and green (empty and rinsed)

Unacceptable items:
- Plastic bags from a grocery or department store
- Styrofoam

The expanded program should boost the University's ranking in the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's RecyclingMania competition, which pits U.S. college and university recycling programs against one another to see which has the highest recycling rate and which can collect the most recyclables and produce the least amount of trash per capita. In 2006, the University ranked ninth nationwide; but Evans and Koch said the goal is to move up.

Evans and Koch said the expanded recycling program is one of many steps the medical school is taking to lessen its impact on the environment. For instance, under a new agreement with the University's trash hauler, the trash compactors now have gauges that indicate when they are full and ready to be emptied. In addition, the school has invested in replacement and upgrading old systems, including replacing boilers, chillers and other production equipment with more efficient and environmentally friendly heating, ventilating and air-conditioning systems in several buildings.

Evans said FMD's Custodial Services also is making changes by using more environmentally friendly cleaning products, and plans to use a different kind of mop stick that doesn't take as much water to launder or chemically clean.

The School is also collecting laboratory supplies and equipment for recycling, such as mercury-based thermometers and pipette tips. Koch said since November 2005, when the pipette tips recycling program began, the effort has kept nine tons of discarded pipette tips out of landfills. "Recycling is not a cost saving move, it's an expense, but it's right thing to do," Evans said.

"The success of this program starts at each employee's desk."

Recipient of Science and Engineering Education Excellence award for his contributions to the Health Sciences.

In addition to Hammerness, key investigators in the center include Daniel Brennan, M.D., professor of medicine; William Kopecky, M.D., professor of radiology and molecular genetics; and Mark Schroeder, M.D., assistant professor of medicine; and Alexander Jefferis, M.D., assistant professor of radiology. The center is one of 13 NIDDK-funded centers.

The grant brings together a tour de force of basic and clinical researchers and clinicians to better understand the way kidney diseases run in families. The National Institutes of Health estimate that certain forms of kidney disease and diabetes are major risk factors, but certain forms of kidney disease run in families.

In the study, Dr. Steve Mamula, a University of Chicago medical assistant professor of medicine, will compare the genetic makeup of mice with kidney disease to those without it, and how the disease develops in each.
Abstract images „Horse Series.”

• A member of the Sloan Research University of California, Los Angeles, institution, and their association have a long history with our in- Holmes Lounge.

For years, John and Penelope came the first to hold this dis- nomics department with the son Hunt Distinguished Profes- sionals and Awards Committee.

A director for the Boeing Co. and J.P. Morgan. Other distinctions include being on Foreign Relations and the American Academy of Arts & Sciences. In addition to serving as a trustee of Washington University, Biggs has assisted his alma mater in many other ways, such as chairing the University’s New Regional Cabinet.

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He started the company in 1979 with friend and fellow alumnus, Danforth offered him the vice chancellor position for finance

Within the Sam Fox School of Art, who retired this year, academic leadership team in

Bruce Lindsey appointed E. Desmond Lee Professor

Lindsey, who arrived at the University in fall 2006, has also developed low-income hous- ing as well as environmentally sustainable projects. He previ- ously served as head of Au- burn University School of Architecture and led its ac-credited College of Architecture, which allows students to design and build innovative "charity hous- es" and other projects for impoverished families.

The project also received a De- sign for the Pittsburgh Glass Center while with "undergraduate architects" earned a gold rat- ushing, dedication to the growth and vitality of the St. Louis region, community and professional as- sociations. The former chairman of the influential National Bu- reau of Economic Research still serves as a director. In addition, he is a director for the Boeing Co. and J.P. Morgan.

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Bruce brings a similar energy and engagement to his teach- ing and professional practice, focusing on the ways in which architecture can serve the community. Indeed, I think that we’re fortunate to be able to keep this professor where he belongs — at the Stern School.

Perhaps most notably, Schuchardt spearheaded cre- ation of University Lofts, 1672 Washington Ave. The $5.6 mil- lion redevelopment project transformed an eight-story, 64,000-square-foot downtown ware- house into affordable liv- ing/working space for dozens of local artists.

Bruce Lindsey, dean of the College of Architecture and the Graduate Program in Architecture & Urban De- sign, has been named the E. Desmond Lee Professor for Community Collaboration in the Sam Fox School of Design & Visual Arts.

"The professorship is one of four established at the Univer- sity since 1997 by St. Louis philanthropist E. Desmond Lee, a 1940 graduate of the John M. Olah School of Business. The professorship is intended to recognize faculty who already have made, and will contin- uously make, important contributions to the mission of engaging the community. As such, the professorship appointment is open to all schools at the University, and is reviewed every five years. It is intended that there be one professorship per school, with the University selecting the individual," said E. Desmond Lee.

Schuchard, during his tenure as Pro- fessor of Art and Architecture, has developed a wide range of fine art projects and initiatives, including the new Del- hammer professor, and Critical Mass, a coalition of local arts organizations. Perhaps most notably, Schuchard spearheaded cre- ation of University Lofts, 1672 Washington Ave. The $5.6 mil- lion redevelopment project transformed an eight-story, 64,000-square-foot downtown ware- house into affordable liv- ing/working space for dozens of artists.

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Martin contender for Woman of the Year

Track and field standout Delaina Martin has been named as one of the Top 30 contenders for the 2007 NCAA Women of the Year award, as selected by the NCAA Committee on Women's Athletics.

From the 100 Women, 10 from each NCAA division, the Committee on Women's Athletics will narrow the field to nine finalists, eventually selecting the 2007 NCAA Woman of the Year.

Martin completed her undergraduate degree in May with a 3.67 grade-point average as a mathematician and Spanish major, both in Arts & Sciences. She finished her four-year college career as the indoor holder in four events — the 20-pound weight throw and shot put indoors, and the hammer throw and shot put outdoors.

Martin is one of the most decorated track and field athletes in University of Missouri history with 16 All-Conference and 20 All-Scholastic honors. She was a member of a Southwestern Athletic Conference champion team in the indoor weight throw in 2005-06, and won the weight throw at the 2006 SWAC Indoor Championships.

"Membranes: Barrier/Gateway of Transparency and Realism," which examines the aesthetics of the digitally generated image that shifts and changes with every movement.

Other works, such as Malin Aitken's "Life (The Kiss)" (1999), investigate the relationship between the window, the body and contemporary transparency and realism, thus underscoring the body's role in association to the body.

Windows shape and define the world literally and figuratively, the ways we see and know our world. Interfaces represent the points of contact between different machines and entities — for example, the screen, the keyboard and the computer that connect the human user.

In August, the Mildred Lane Kemper Art Museum will present "Window Interface," the second installment in its Science Arts and New Media Aesthetics series.

"Window Interface" will highlight a variety of artistic projects, including videos, photographs and multimedia installations that explore the roles of windows and interfaces across various sites and arenas of interaction between machine and mind. The presentation will offer a new perspective by connecting the computer with the human user.

In the series, "Window Interface" is organized by Selene Etxebarria, Ph.D., director and chief curator of the Kemper Art Museum, and Laura McAlpine, Ph.D., curator for new media and professor of Gender and Sexuality Studies in Arts & Sciences.

The exhibition explores the ways in which artists such as Doug Aitken, David Hilliard and Jeff Wall have used windows to represent abstracted, disembodied and framed sight.

For example, Evans' "Think of this as a Window" (2005) consists of a large sheet of glass spilling out the title on a horizontal, window-like sheet of Plexiglas. The piece highlights the architectural role of architecture as a means to develop new structures, as a means to frame and diffuse light, and as a means to filter visual information.

"Window Interface" (2005) posits a kind of dysfunctional window that questions both the window as a means to filter visual information and the way we interact with our environment today, electronic or otherwise.

In "25 Foot Window Series" (1999), a video installation that explores the effect of windows on the interaction with the outside world.

The exhibition also includes a series of groundbreaking video works from the late 1960s and early 1970s. Campau "Proyecto para la Interfaz," a collaborative effort of video artists, which consists of a glass sheet upon which the viewer's reflection is both reflected and broadcast. "TV Cello Premiers" (1971), a collaborative work between Neville, Paluk, Jud Yalkut and Charlotte Mooreman, depicts Mooreman, a ballad-trained musician and flutist, in action, in her first performance with video. Also on view will be Beuys' "Flute "in TV 1970." In this piece, the artist interacts with a fellow television screen, while Alveo Explo's provocative "Touch Cinema" (1968), a videotaped performance in which passers-by were invited to reach inside a miniature "theater" concealing Export's naked chest.

The Screen Arts and New Media Aesthetics series is designed to stimulate dialogue about the aesthetics of the digital and its impact in contemporary research, discourse and artistic practice. The series highlights emerging electronic forms as well as other forms of technologically generated art such as photography, film and video through publications, workshops and discussions.

Musician and composer Tony Fitzpatrick was named arts dean in Arts & Sciences.

"Victory L. May, science outreach director since 1996, has been appointed assistant dean of Arts & Sciences by Edward Macias, Ph.D., the chancellor, dean of Arts & Sciences and the Barbara and David D. Distel Distinguished Professor in Arts & Sciences.

The appointment was effective July 1. Fitzpatrick will work as science outreach program a model for other universities in this country," said Macias. "This new position recognizes the many successes and future opportunities in all parts of Arts & Sciences.

"I think teaching is the hardest job in the world," May said.

"I believe in the power of partnership and collaboration to build the science and math programs of the future," May said. "This new position recognizes my strong commitment to the education initiatives of the Missouri METS (Mathematics, Engineering, Technology, Science) initiative."
Texting — from Page 1
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uals who have provided their cell
phone number. There is no charge
for the program, although charges
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VOLUNTARILY REGISTERING FOR THE SYSTEM
acknowledgment of acceptance and con-
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of messages and test messages.

The University has engaged
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System is voluntary, and text mes-
sages only will be sent to individ-
uals who have provided their cell
phone number. There is no charge
for the program, although charges
for receipt of a text message may
apply under certain circumstances.

VOLUNTARILY REGISTERING FOR THE SYSTEM
acknowledgment of acceptance and con-
tact numbers related to receipt
of messages and test messages.

The University has engaged
clearTXT to provide this service.
Gregory, Shearrer named to new positions in Medical Alumni and Development

BY DIANE DUKKA WILKINS

Patricia Gregory has been named assistant vice chancellor for medical corporate and foundation relations, and David Shearrer has been named executive director of development for clinical programs in Medical Alumni and Development.

Gregory, Ph.D., has been the University's executive director of corporate and foundation relations since 1992.

In her new role, she will continue to oversee the university's corporate and foundation fund raising at the medical campus and take on additional responsibilities in Medical Alumni and Development Programs. As part of the Medical School and Development Leadership Team, she will report to Pamela Buell, associate vice chancellor and director of Medical Alumni and Development.

Before she joined Washington University, Gregory spent 18 years at Northwestern University as assistant chancellor and senior lecturer in its Department of Chemistry, Molecular Biology and Cell Biology and associate director of Northwestern University's Center for Interdisciplinary Research on the Aging of Cells (CIRAC). She also worked in admissions and student life at Northwestern University as well as at the University of Chicago.

Campus Card Account expands services

In response to the interest of students, parents and other members of the University community, the Campus Card Account (CCA) has expanded its services.

Accomplished through the University ID office, Campus Card Account (CCA) has expanded its services to accommodate undergraduate, school and departmental accounts as well as the online Library and the Student Services offices.

The undergraduate and graduate student CCA can continue to be managed through WebSTAC. Faculty and staff manage their accounts through the Student Services Office.

The CCA most recently expanded to include the three Arena dining locations, the Student Center and the School of Medicine. All members of the University community may use their CCA at the School of Medicine, as well as those at the Medical School at Washington University.

Gregory, Shipit and the University's executive director for medical alumni and development, David Shearrer, have agreed to take up this demanding role and to make the University more visible to people who care about medical schools.

Gregory, Shipit will focus on the University's School of Medicine with Disabilities, Act.

In his new role, Gregory, Shipit will have responsibility for promoting and enhancing the intellectual life of the law school. He will coordinate external and internal faculty workshops, as well as conferences and events.

Kornfeld earned his juris doctoration from Harvard in 1993, where he served as the policy director of the law school. He was also a visiting assistant professor at the University of Michigan.

His appointment follows a tenure as deputy foreign affairs counsel to the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence.

Kornfeld earned his bachelor's degree in 1987 from George Washington University in Washington, D.C., and a doctorate in biochemistry in 1993 from Washington University School of Medicine.

He is survived by her husband, Stuart, and three children: Katherine Kornfeld, Kerry Kornfeld, M.D., Ph.D., associate professor of pediatrics at Boston Children's Hospital and pharmacology; and Carolyn Leonard, professor of biochemistry at the University of Washington.

Obituaries

Arias, 73

Eugene Arias, M.D., Ph.D., professor of obstetrics and gynecology and head of the division of maternal-fetal medicine, died Aug. 10, 2007, in Maumee, Ohio, of complications from cancer. He was 73.

Samuel R. Bagens, J.D., professor of law, has been appointed associate dean for research and faculty development at the School of Law, effective July 1, according to Dean Karen Syverud and A.H. Sheppy Professor of Law, John S. Martin Professor at the School of Law.

Bagens succeeds Professor Andrew Wiedenbeck, who was named associate dean in 2005.

"I am very pleased to have Sam Bagens for taking up this demanding position after Peter Wiedenbeck's very successful tenure as associate dean," Syverud said.

"Sam is a natural intellectual and academic leader who will be helpful to all of us at the law school and in the University," Bagens said.

Kornfeld joined the faculty of the School of Law in 2004. His research focuses on civil rights and antidiscrimination law, with some emphasis on disability law and the Americans with Disabilities Act.

"There was no question in my mind that he would be our first choice for the job," said Dean Karen Syverud.

Bagens was born in November 1956 in England and moved to the United States when he was a child. He received his bachelor's degree from the University of Chicago and his juris doctor from the University of Michigan Law School.

"Sam" is posted on the publication's Web site, news.wustl.edu.

A complete list of the rankings is posted on the publication's Web site, news.wustl.edu.

Gregory, Shipit is a continuing partner in the Washington Post and a graduate of the University of Chicago's law school. He was admitted to the bar in 1991 and has been a member of the bar since 1992.

His appointment follows a tenure as deputy foreign affairs counsel to the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence.

Kornfeld earned his bachelor's degree in 1987 from George Washington University in Washington, D.C., and a doctorate in biochemistry in 1993 from Washington University School of Medicine.

He is survived by her husband, Stuart, and three children: Katherine Kornfeld, Kerry Kornfeld, M.D., Ph.D., associate professor of pediatrics at Boston Children's Hospital and pharmacology; and Carolyn Leonard, professor of biochemistry at the University of Washington.

Obituaries
Bob Chekoudjian has transitioned from punk rocker to computer expert

Bob Chekoudjian, on vacation in Breckenridge, Colo.

By Andy Cundiff

It could be said that Bob Chekoudjian’s life has been a matter of being in the right place at the right time.

Whether it was getting his job at the University, falling in love with bike riding, meeting his wife or gaining a hand that would eventually open up for the Ramones at the old Mississippi Nights, Chekoudjian has been pretty fortuitous regarding major life events.

Born and raised in St. Louis, Chekoudjian, L2S engineer in Personal Computing Support Services (PCSS) in the Office of Information Services & Technology, has been a part of the University community for nearly seven years.

But his background gave no indication of his career path at WUSTL.

“Bob’s more fine arts classmate than computer classes, and his educational background is pretty much all art related. But he came into computers when they were first introduced, at a time when nobody had a computer background,” he says. “It’s a very organic relationship that I have with computers in that re-...