VCU Performs New Endoscopic Procedure to Relieve Heartburn

Suturing Done Through Endoscope for First Time in Virginia

Early this month, physicians at the VCU Health System became the first in the state to perform a new endoscopic procedure to relieve heartburn caused by reflux. The technique uses an endoscope—a small flexible tube with a camera and light—that is equipped with a new type of suturing device attached to the tip.

“This procedure will have the same impact on endoscopic surgery as laparoscopic techniques had on traditional surgery,” said Ann Sanjal, M.D., chairman of VCU School of Medicine’s Department of Gastroenterology.

MCV Hospitals is one of about a dozen centers in the country performing the procedure.

The technique, called an endoluminal gastroplication, involves sewing pleats in the lower portion of the esophagus to prevent stomach acid from backing up into the esophagus, causing heartburn. The pleats are made with a device that works like a tiny sewing machine. The outpatient procedure requires no incisions, making it less invasive than current laparoscopic techniques that have been the standard over the past 10 years.

Esophageal reflux affects about 15 million Americans and is characterized by painful burning symptoms in the chest, difficulty swallowing and nausea. It is generally the result of an abnormal junction between the lower portion of the esophagus—the esophageal sphincter—and the upper part of the stomach. When the sphincter does not function properly, or if there is increased abdominal pressure, stomach acid can back up, or reflux, into the esophagus, resulting in heartburn.

Saying Hello

University Lands Research Awards Connected with VCU Life Sciences

by Erin Lucero

University News Services

VCU has received two newly funded research awards supporting projects closely aligned with VCU Life Sciences.

In May, Gov. Jim Gilmore announced VCU’s two grants as part of $18 million in funding to Virginia’s research universities. VCU will lead a cancer genomics project that received $3 million in funding and also will participate in a $1.5 million, four-university initiative to establish a statewide bioinformatics consortium.

“These two areas of research are strategically important to the future of VCU Life Sciences,” said Thomas F. Huff, Ph.D., VCU vice provost for life sciences. “We’re delighted that our first effort at competing for funding has met with such success.”

Huff and Marsha R. Torr, Ph.D., VCU vice president for research, worked closely together in coordinating the university’s effort to identify projects and develop the grant proposals.

“Cancer genomics and bioinformatics are two areas of existing strength for our university,” Torr said. “These awards give us the opportunity to enhance our competitive base.

VCU Participates in National Liver Dialysis Study

Mitchell L. Shiffler, M.D., is One of Four Principal Investigators in the United States.

Massey Cancer Center Leads Bryostatin 1 Study

New Compound Will Be Tested in Combination With Conventional Chemotherapy

Researcher Reports on Implantable Drug Pump for Cancer Pain

Grants to Date

$121,468,640

Research@VCU

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Sen. Allen Addresses International Microelectronics Conference at VCU

Bio-Tech Park Receives Award

AmeriCorps Program Earns Grant

Physical Therapy Graduate Wins National Award

VCU Recognized for Hosting Robotics Competition

Guiseppi-Elio Speaks at Chemistry Summit in Cuba

Bonis, Raymond F.

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Over the next several weeks, nearly 3,000 incoming freshmen and transfer students will get a taste of the college experience at VCU, as well as take placement tests, meet with faculty advisers, register for fall classes and get more familiar with the campus. It all takes place during the annual STAR (Student Testing Advising Registration) program. The STAR program offers a chance for new students, along with their families, to get a feel for campus life at VCU. By registering early for classes, new students can receive their course schedule and do some advanced planning for the coming year. Students also have the option to spend a night in a residence hall to get an early taste of college life. Pictured here, a new student discusses her fall schedule with faculty members.

University Launches ‘Just Say Hello’ Campaign

by J. Suzanne Horstey

University News Services

When Roderick McDavis, Ph.D., arrived at VCU two years ago as provost and vice president for academic affairs, he noticed people on campus did not echo his greetings of “good morning” or “hello.” Determined to make this urban campus a friendlier environment, McDavis joined with the faculty and staff senate to launch the “Just Say Hello” campaign.

“This is an effort to create a strong sense of community.”

McDavis said, “On an urban campus, people tend to come for a short time and then leave. One way to make it feel more like a community is to say hello to each other.”

McDavis acknowledged the challenge that an urban campus such as VCU has when trying to foster a feeling of community. Because VCU does not have physical boundaries, the city and campus sidewalks are often indistinguishable. Campus pedestrians include many people who are not part of the VCU community such as tourists, patients, shoppers and local business people. This can make students feel more like they are in a city environment rather than on a university campus, making it even more important to initiate this campaign.

“Saying ‘hello’ and ‘good morning’ not only make a friendlier atmosphere at VCU,” said Karen Gilliam, president of the Staff
Allen Addresses International Microelectronics Conference

by Mike Frontiero
University News Services

Three years after leaving his bootprints in cement to mark the completion of VCU’s School of Engineering, George F. Allen returned to campus as a U.S. senator and keynote speaker for an international conference of engineering educators and researchers. The group assembled to discuss the latest advances in microelectronics technology and education.

Allen shared his vision of what Virginia and other states need to compete successfully in a high-tech world of shrinking microchips and computers that become obsolete before they reach the store.

"We're stepping down July 1 as dean of VCU's School of Education, John S. Oehler, Ed.D., now is leading the university’s Center for Schools and Community Collaboration.

The center, founded in 1990 by Gaynelle A. Whitlock, Ph.D., works with school districts throughout Virginia to prevent alcohol and substance abuse, youth violence and crisis situations. Whitlock is retiring after securing close to $4 million in grant funding for programs that bring educators, criminal justice officials, law enforcement officials and other community representatives together to develop strategies that benefit students and their families.

As director, Oehler wants to expand social, health and educational services; build on the center's relationships with organizations, such as the Boys and Girls Clubs; and involve graduate students in the center's work.

This is an exciting opportunity for me," Oehler said. "I enjoy my work at VCU because I think schools are important and education is an area where you can make a difference." In addition to directing the center, Oehler will work as a fellow in VCU’s Commonwealth Educational Policy Institute and teach doctoral students full time.

Other featured speakers included Max Yoder, Ph.D., director of electronics at the Office of Naval Research; James Groves, Ph.D., director of research and industrial programs at the University of Virginia's Center for Nanoscale Materials Design; and W.A.M. van Noije, Ph.D., head of electronic systems engineering at the University of Sao Paulo's Politechnic School in Brazil.

The Virginia Microelectronics Consortium — representing several universities, including VCU — presented its collaborative efforts in education and research, including creating endowed professorships in engineering and the VCU School of Engineering and the Virginia Microelectronics Center.

"Never be satisfied with where you are, because especially in technology, what you have one day will be improved the next week."

"Hello" campaign will kick off officially in September with events on each campus. Gold stickers, bookmarks, "say hello" cards and flyers will promote the message. Students, faculty and staff will be able to nominate individuals as Friendship Ambassadors of the Month, who will be recognized at a year-end reception.

"I think this issue is on the minds of a lot of people, but it's not discussed in the public forum," McDavis said. "This is a way to get us all talking in public and bringing attention to a rather simple concept — just saying "hello."
LIFE SCIENCES

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in areas where we have existing strength. We'll leverage this funding by attracting additional funding from federal and industry sources."

"Today's economy depends on the continuous creation and dissemination of new knowledge through academic research," Gilmore said. "Top-notch research is critical in attracting high-tech companies to Virginia."

VIRGINIA BIOINFORMATICS CONSORTIUM

A $1.5 million grant award establishing the Virginia Bioinformatics Consortium will be shared equally among VCU, the University of Virginia, Virginia Tech and George Mason University. Combining the unique strengths of each institution, the effort will use sophisticated computer technology to understand life at the molecular level.

"We've seen dramatic advances in the field of science over the past decade," said Gregory A. Buck, Ph.D., principal investigator of VCU's portion and professor of microbiology and immunology in the School of Medicine. "Those advances will continue if we start to develop and apply technological tools to exploit the volume of data that modern science generates."

The effort to map the human genome, for example, has produced vast quantities of information that no individual can master. Bioinformatic tools, however, have the power to quickly analyze the detailed information. With analysts in hand, scientists can begin to translate research data into therapies that heal illness, correct genetic defects and delay progressive disease.

While this emerging field of bioinformatics is essential to the continued development of medical research, there are few scientists proficient in the field. Buck believes that the consortium has the potential to attract large, industry-sponsored projects that require the resources of multiple institutions.

"By coming together as equal partners, our consortium has the potential to attract the best talent that none of us could tackle alone," said Buck, who also directs VCU's Nucleic Acids Research Facilities. "In many cases, different universities possess different pieces of the puzzle. If we had unlimited resources, we could duplicate one another's effort, but this consortium gives us the opportunity to share our comprehensive resources and work together more efficiently toward common goals."

Already, a handful of projects have been identified that match investigators at different institutions, and project planning is under way. The award also will strengthen each university's bioinformatics capabilities by supporting joint workshops for faculty and students to promote statewide approaches to workforce training, drug discovery and data management.

"We've made the strategic commitment to use VCU Life Sciences to bolster research at VCU," Huff said. "This grant award lays the groundwork for additional funding for any number of innovative research projects and because the application of bioinformatics will be so critical to future scientific discovery."

CANCER GENOMICS PROJECT

With $3 million in funding from the Commonwealth Technology Research Fund, and matching funds contributed by VCU, a cancer genomics project will develop more cost-effective methods of diagnosing and treating cancer. Built on existing VCU strengths, the interdisciplinary genomics effort also will draw on the unique assets of the INOVA Health System and GMU.

"This initiative is a model of how disciplines from across the university can come together to land a major research award," Torr said. "That type of interdisciplinary cooperation has become a critical component in successfully competing for significant research dollars."

By studying the genetics of cancer cells collected from brain-tumor, leukemia and lymphoma patients, researchers hope to tailor drug therapies to attack molecular targets. A national search will be conducted for a researcher to lead the cancer genomics effort and coordinate the work of a number of key groups:

• Genetic analysis requires a large patient base. Together, the VCU and INOVA health systems will provide about 5,000 new cancer cases per year for potential gene analysis.
  • VCU's Molecular Diagnostics and DNA Core labs are specially equipped to perform complex analyses that will lead to a better understanding of how tumor genes work.
  • VCU and GMU will provide bioinformatics expertise in the development of a computer-based cancer tumor bank that will analyze information on thousands of cancer cells collected from participating patients.
  • The School of Engineering has the capability to develop biochips that will make fast and inexpensive diagnosis possible.
  • The VCU and INOVA health systems' strong clinical presence will again come into play when new diagnostics and treatments are ready for evaluation.

"We've made the strategic commitment to use VCU Life Sciences to bolster research at VCU," Huff said. "This grant award lays the groundwork for additional funding for any number of innovative research projects and because the application of bioinformatics will be so critical to future scientific discovery."

AmeriCorps Program Receives Grant for Literacy Development

by J. Suzanne Horsley
University News Services

This fall, about 400 elementary school students in the Richmond area will receive one-on-one reading support, thanks to a grant recently awarded to VCU's AmeriCorps program. Starting in August, 30 part-time and seven full-time AmeriCorps members will be assigned to area schools to work with academically challenged elementary students, helping them read at grade level by the end of their third-grade year.

The Corporation for National Service awarded VCU nearly $375,000 to fund the program during the 2001-02 academic year. VCU's program is the first AmeriCorps program in Virginia to receive national funding through the competitive grant process. The AmeriCorps program focused on early elementary reading development because, as stated in its grant proposal, "Before third grade, children learn to read. After third grade, children read to learn."

With grant funds in hand, the next challenge is filling the corps positions.

"This is an excellent opportunity for students to give back to the community and have real-world experiences," said Jennifer Kelman, Ph.D., director of VCU's AmeriCorps program. "We need our faculty and staff to get the word out to students that these opportunities are available."

Part-time members will provide 20 hours of service per week at their assigned schools. In addition to individual reading support, they also will provide services such as monitoring after-school activities, assisting with parent-centered activities, helping with family literacy programs or coordinating special programs. Full-time members will provide 40 hours of service per week and serve as team leaders at each school.

AmeriCorps members will receive a stipend, and participants who log 900 hours by the end of the year (1,700 for full-time) will receive educational awards to pay back school loans or to use for future educational endeavors.

Since the VCU AmeriCorps program began six years ago, the focus has shifted from broader educational support to targeting first- and second-graders who need to improve their reading skills. An evaluation of AmeriCorps efforts during the 1999-2000 school year showed that 53 percent of students who were tutored by AmeriCorps experienced significant gains in reading proficiency.

"The school students aren't the only ones who benefit from the program. AmeriCorps members report having valuable — and often life-changing — experiences. "Service can be a transforming experience for students," said Kelman. "Some have changed their career paths or majors because of their experiences in the AmeriCorps program."

Anne Marie Vastano, a 2000 psychology graduate, has been serving as a reading coach to first- and second-graders at Bellevue Elementary School in Church Hill for the past year. Interested in a career with a non-profit organization or in social services, she found the AmeriCorps program to be a great way to contribute to the community while building her resume.

"I feel lucky to be able to participate in such a meaningful experience," Vastano said. "I sometimes wonder, Who's teaching whom? Sure, I teach reading skills to children. But the community members and children I have met through the AmeriCorps program have taught me so much more about themselves, human nature, the community, society and finally myself."

The deadline to apply for the 2001-02 term is Aug. 13. For details, call 826-8850.
VCU Physical Therapy Graduate Earns National Award

By Michael Ford
University News Services

One month after earning her VCU graduate degree, 25-year-old Carissa Bennett, M.S., P.T., headed to Anaheim, Calif., to be recognized as one of the nation's top physical therapy students by the American Physical Therapy Association.

The APTA awarded Bennett its 2001 Minority Scholarship for Academic Excellence. Earlier this year, she earned a similar scholarship from the Virginia Physical Therapy Association.

"I loved my program here at VCU. They worked us hard, but I always felt like they gave us great support," said Bennett, who earned her bachelor's degree in biology from Oberlin College in Ohio.

"I just appreciate all the professors - all that they've done for me and all of my classmates. They really care about making us first-rate physical therapists."

While pursuing graduate studies, Bennett made contributions to VCU and the city by participating in community service projects such as health fairs. She also served on the Recruitment and Retention Committee for the Department of Physical Therapy, part of the School of Allied Health Professions.

Bennett's interest in physical therapy was sparked after she injured her knee in middle school. The Tallahassee, Fla., native was impressed by how much physical therapy shortened her recovery time.

"It's a great field for anyone who's interested in athletics and science," Bennett said.

Byrne Receives Distinguished Alumnus Award from MWC

In June 2, Ellen Byrne, Ph.D., D.D.S., associate professor in the VCU School of Dentistry, received the Distinguished Alumnus Award from the Mary Washington College Alumni Association. The award, given to alumni who demonstrate outstanding achievement in professional and civic activities, was presented during the school's reunion weekend in Fredericksburg.

Byrne completed her pre-pharmacy work at MWC before coming to VCU to earn a bachelor's degree in pharmacy. In 1983, she graduated from the VCU School of Dentistry and went on to receive a doctoral degree in pharmacology and toxicology. Byrne is widely published and recognized nationally as a leading authority in the field of pharmacology.

VCU Recognized for Hosting Robotics Competition

by Mary Beth Alford
University News Services

The NASA Langley/VCU School of Engineering FIRST Robotics Competition was awarded the Technology Skillbuilders Award at the Sixth Annual Technology Stars Awards Gala held at the Richmond Marriott. Given by the Greater Richmond Technology Council, the award recognizes local businesses and individuals for their positive technology-related leadership, contribution to the community, introduction of new technology, growth in the field of technology and promotion of technology as an integral part of the learning experience.

The FIRST Competition is a national engineering contest that immerses high-school students in the world of engineering. Teaming up with engineers from businesses and universities, students get a hands-on, inside look at the engineering profession. In six intense weeks, students and engineers work together to design, construct and test robots. The robots, built with function as well as aesthetics in mind, compete in two-minute rounds, requiring teams to strategize and hold crucial design decisions into their designs. The competition promotes problem-solving, critical thinking and teamwork.

In 2000, NASA Langley and the VCU School of Engineering formed a partnership of schools and businesses to host a FIRST Robotics Competition in Richmond. In just two years of hosting the event, the number of teams grew from 39 in the first year to 71 teams from a five-state region in 2001. Richmond is now the permanent home of the annual regional competition.

Rezba Named Interim Education Dean

by Mike Frontiero
University News Services

Known to many colleagues as "Mr. Wizard" because of his quarter-century of training teachers in cutting-edge instructional technology and science education, Richard J. Rezba, Ph.D., director of VCU's Science Education Project, is now working his magic as interim dean of the School of Education.

"Being interim dean will allow me to undertake some initiatives that will benefit faculty," said Rezba, who joined VCU in 1976. "I will bring a faculty member's view of what needs to be done."

The School of Education already receives the second-highest total of research grant dollars among schools at VCU. Rezba wants to build on that success by giving faculty more resources to construct and manage budgets, which can reach up to $1 million for a single grant.

"Faculty who start with a small grant are often overwhelmed with the financial side of it," Rezba said. "I want to make it easier for them to do the job they were hired to do, and part of that is just making sure the resources we have are used effectively."

Reza took the school's helm July 1, succeeding John S. Oehler, Ed.D., who returned to teaching after 16 years as dean. Rezba intends to lead the school for one year while a nationwide search continues for a permanent replacement, and then help new faculty and others develop grant proposals.

A native of Tampa, Fla., Rezba earned his undergraduate and master's degrees at the University of Florida and an additional master's and his doctoral degree at Indiana University.

VCU Libraries Offers Access to Elsevier Science’s Journal Collection

The VCU Libraries now offers access to publisher Elsevier Science's entire journal collection through ScienceDirect, the premier electronic service for scientific, technical and medical information. The contract, representing one of the most significant acquisitions in VCU Libraries history, provides an incomparable research tool for the VCU community.

Offering more than 1.5 million articles, ScienceDirect provides Web access to the complete text of more than 1,200 Elsevier Science research journals. The new contract will more than triple the number of Elsevier subscriptions the VCU Libraries now makes available to VCU faculty, staff and students.

VCU faculty, students, and staff can access new journals at www.sciencedirect.com, and then click on "group-wide login."

American Dance Offers Scholarships to Dance Students

Each year, the American Dance Festival, the premier international summer dance festival in the United States, awards competitive talent-based scholarships to dance students who audition in every region of the country through the American College Dance Festival.

This year, ADF awarded three rising seniors with scholarships. Andrew DeFiesta, received a full-tuition scholarship, and Feri McCray and Katie Harris both received half-tuition scholarships.
VCU Participates in National Liver Dialysis Study

by Michael Ford
University News Services

A
VCU researcher is part of a na-
tional multi-center study comparing the
effectiveness of liver dialysis against
traditional medical therapy in treating patients whose end-stage liver disease is
affecting their cognitive functions. VCU's
Mitchell L. Shiffman, M.D., professor of
internal medicine in the School of Medi-
cine and medical director of the Hepatol-
yogy-Liver Transplant Program, is one of
four principal investigators in the United
States.

Approved by the Food and Drug
Administration in December a new liver
dialysis device by HemoTherapy Inc can eliminate the life-threatening toxins that are associated with liver failure. The device is designed to balance blood chemistries by removing toxins from the blood and at the same time return needed electrolytes and glu-
cose to patients.

"This technology could enable us to improve the management of our patients with end-stage liver disease who are awaiting transplant," Shiffman said. "If we can prolong the survival of these critically ill patients, we can make it possible for them to eventually undergo successful liver transplantation. The results of this study have the potential to make liver-assist technology the standard of care for advanced-stage liver disease patients in this country."

The liver acts as a filter that metabolizes and removes toxins from the body. The liver's filtering ability is reduced for patients with end-stage liver disease, which can lead to acute hepatic encephalopathy, a decline in mental status. The current standard of care, a drug like lactulose, is ineffective in some patients. It can cause substantial discomfort and may have significant side effects. The HemoTherapy Inc device is the only liver-assist device cleared by the FDA for treating patients suffering from encephalopathy due to liver disease caused by hepatitis, cirrhosis or drug overdose.

Infection Control Practices Successfully Combat Bacteria

antibiotic resistance is an increasing
problem at health-care facilities, lead-
ing to patient infections and increased medical costs. A three-year study indicates that aggressive infection-control practices can effectively reduce the spread of an important antibiotic resistant pathogen.

Published in the May 10 issue of The
New England Journal of Medicine, the study surveyed 32 health-care facilities in the Midwest. Lead author Bellinda E. Ostrowsky, M.D., assistant professor of internal medicine in the School of Medi-
cine and associate epidemiologist at VCU's MCV Hospitals, conducted the study at the Centers for Disease Control and Pre-
vention.

The study was prompted when van-
cocin-resistant enterococci (VRE) was detected in 1996 and began spreading among health-care facilities in the St. Paul, Minnesota area. Vancomycin is an antibiotic of choice for treating serious infec-
tions caused by enterococci, staphylococci and other pathogens.

by Michael Ford

Research Reports on Implantable Drug Pump for Cancer Pain

Thousands of patients with cancer suffer from pain that conventional treatment alone cannot control. Early results from an international study led by a VCU researcher suggest that patients can get relief through an implantable pump that infuses small and precisely controlled doses of morphine directly into their spinal fluid.

"As oncologists, we do our best to treat our patients' cancer and their pain with the tools and techniques we know, but thousands of cancer patients still live and die in pain," said Thomas Smith, M.D., chair of hematology and oncology at VCU's Massey Cancer Center and the School of Medi-
cine. "Early results from this research should encourage more oncologists to consider using implantable programmable drug pumps to treat patients who continue to experience intractable pain."

Smith, principal investigator on the 21-center, worldwide study, presented early results at the annual American Society of Clinical Oncology meeting. He reported findings from 22 patients, a small subset of the 200 expected to participate.

Results showed that patients' pain was reduced by 20 per-
cent, while side effects were reduced by 47 percent. Addi-
tionally, patients with implantable pumps maintained their quality of life even though patients had reached a stage of their disease where quality of life usually declines.

Traditional pain management usually includes powerful narcotics, such as morphine or oxycodone, taken by mouth in escalating doses. For patients who receive some relief from pain pills, oral medications often cause side effects, including nausea, vomiting, sedation and constipation. In these cases, patients may not be able to tolerate the dose required to relieve their pain.

Sponsored by the Minneapolis-based Medtronic Inc., the clinical trial uses the company's SynchroMed EL Infusion Sys-
tem for what is termed intrathecal pain therapy. The pro-
grammable drug pump and catheter are surgically placed under the skin of the abdomen and driven by a programmable device. The drug is delivered directly to the spinal fluid, small doses can be very effective. The same therapy is used to treat nonmalignant pain when oral medications no longer provide adequate relief with acceptable side effects. Since 1991, more than 45,000 people worldwide have received Medtronic-
cic drug pumps. Final study results are expected in early 2002.
Guiseppi-Elie Addresses Global Chemistry Summit

Cuba Played Host to 1,200 Professors, Government Researchers

Havana is not known for being at the forefront of science, but in April the capital of Fidel Castro’s communist nation played host to some 1,200 professors and government researchers attending an international chemistry summit, including VCU chemical engineer Anthony Guiseppi-Elie, Sc.D.

There is much quality science and important technological innovation going on in the Caribbean Basin and throughout Latin America," he said. "Cuba has made a significant commitment to the chemical sciences and biotechnology, and this was apparent in the many high-quality talks given at this meeting.”

Guiseppi-Elie, who directs VCU’s Center for Bioelectronics, Biosensors and Biochips, was one of only four North Americans to participate in the inaugural e-Health Conference and Exhibition, this year held in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. Representing VCU were CHARLES R. BOAHA, M.B.A., assistant professor and executive director of the Medical Informatics and Technology Applications Consortium based at VCU, and NIPS LATAPI, M.D., a VCU trauma surgeon who serves as director of Education and Distance Learning for MITAC.

LEON FORRESTOR, an electronic media major and rising senior in the School of Mass Communications, won the 2001 Virginia Associated Press Broadcasting Scholarship. Forrestor, who works part-time at WWBT-TV12, competed with students from seven other Virginia colleges and universities.

GEORGIA M. FOWLES, M.Ed., pediatrician, School of Medicine, and RUTH A. SANGIULIANO, M.Ed. in Special Education, Severe Disabilities, were the first recipients of the Dr. Howard G. Garner Scholarship. The scholarship, selected by Dr. Garner, a former faculty member and the first director of the Virginia Institute for Developmental Disabilities (VIDD). The scholarships provide financial assistance for training and research at the graduate or advanced level of education to pursue interdisciplinary study in the field of developmental disabilities.

GUtg JIANASSOCCU, a personnel auditor of the Department of Music, was declared winner of the annual artist International NY Debut Recital Competition. He will be presented in his New York debut at Carnegie Hall on June 22, 2002.

The fight choreography of Theater Chair DAVID LEONG, M.F.A., can be seen in the acclaimed Broadway play “King Hedley II,” written by two-time Pulitzer Prize winner August Wilson and directed by Marion McClinton. Leong is currently staging the fights for a new play by Kia Corthron called "Breathe, Boom...", a play about black female gangsters. He has also been invited to join the production team for the Broadway revival of "The Great White Hope," opening spring 2002.

The Southern Conference on Slavic Studies presented its Senior Service Award to GEORGE E. MUNRO, Ph.D., professor of history, for a distinguished career. Munro, who has been a faculty member at VCU for more than 35 years.

Snedden Named Interim Dean of Graduate Studies

by J. Suzanne Horsley
University News Services

Aber T. Sneden III, Ph.D., senior associate dean of the College of Humanities and Sciences and professor of chemistry, has been named interim dean of graduate studies. His appointment was effective July 1. The search for a permanent dean will be initiated later this year.

"Dr. Sneden was selected based on his administrative experience in the College of Humanities and Sciences and his experience with graduate programs and students," said Rodney McQuiss, Ph.D., provost and vice president for academic affairs. "We think he will do an outstanding job as interim dean during the next academic year." Sneden, who has taught chemistry at VCU since 1977, has several goals for promoting VCU’s academic reputation in his new position.

I would like to work with the schools and the college to try to develop new graduate programs," he said. "I also want to work with graduate students to find ways to support their graduate education and research needs. I look forward to the increased interaction with graduate students from other programs.”

As of last spring, there were more than 5,400 graduate students enrolled at VCU.

Sneden received his bachelor’s degree in chemistry from Carnegie-Mellon University in 1968 and his doctorate in organic chemistry from Brandeis University in 1975. His research interest in natural-products chemistry focuses on plant compounds with biological activity. He currently supervises three graduate students in the “Leaf Squeezer” research group who have published several studies related to the therapeutic aspects of the human-animal bond, including a 1996 study that showed anxiety levels for psychiatric patients significantly decreased after spending 30 minutes with a therapy dog.

This is an emerging field with more evidence coming to light about the health benefits of interacting with companion animals," Barker said. "VCU is seen as one of the leaders because of some of the work we’ve already completed in this area."

Barker’s latest research, with co-researcher Anand Pandurangi, M.D., chair of VCU’s MCV Campus’ Pain Institute, involves studying the effects of therapy dogs on patient depression, an emotional state characterized by anxiety, distress, restlessness, prior to electroconvulsive therapy. Barker has her own certified therapy dog “H.L.,” an American Kennel Club champion Lhasa Apso, who interacts with patients.

In addition to research, services at the Center for Human-Animal Interaction include: pet-loss counseling services to assist owners experiencing distress over the loss of a pet; animal-assisted therapy to help patients meet treatment goals by incorporating interaction with certified therapy animals; and animal-assisted activities or pet visitation to soothe anxious hospital patients facing serious medical treatments.

The patients tell us they love having the therapy dogs come to visit them, and we have seen some remarkable patient improvement following some of these interactions," Barker said. "Some patients want a dog on the bed with them to cuddle and others get out of bed to play with a dog. We think patients find it a non-threatening diversion from the hospital. Either way, they’re able to do something other than be in bed for medical testing they have to endure."

The center will draw on faculty expertise from several areas, including family practice medicine, preventive medicine, psychology, addiction psychiatry, biology, pharmacy, rehabilitation counseling and gerontology.
Tennis, Baseball, Golf Teams Play in NCAA Tournaments

by Mike Frontiero
University News Services

The VCU Rams recorded another outstanding spring season, with the baseball, golf, men's and women's tennis teams reaching the NCAA tournament. Finishing at 41-19, the baseball team tied for the third-most wins in VCU history and reached the NCAA tournament for the third time in four years under head coach Paul Keyes. The Rams, who reached the regional championship game before falling to defending national champion Louisiana State, finished the year ranked 24th nationally by Collegiate Baseball.

Anchors away came when junior Joshua Artooga of Homestead, Fla., was selected by the Chicago Cubs in the Major League Baseball First-Year Player Draft. Arteaga, who transferred to VCU after two years at Mottow State Community College, is an Oregon native and enjoyed a burner season for the Rams and was instrumental in VCU's return to the NCAA tournament this spring.

"This was one of the most talented teams we've ever had," Keyes said. "Our players performed very well, despite some injuries."

The men's tennis team, which advanced to the finals last year, made its ninth consecutive appearance in the NCAA Team Championships. VCU lost to No. 22 Ohio State 4-3 in the first round.

Senior Frank Moser and junior Florian Markwardt, both from Germany, lost to the third-seeded Southern Methodist team 3-6, 6-4, 6-4 in the quarterfinals of the NCAA Doubles Championship. They ended a remarkable season for Moser and Markwardt (23-11), ranked seventh nationally in the last International Tennis Association poll.

The pairs' victories are the second-most in men's tennis history for a single season.

In women's NCAA tennis tournament, VCU lost to No. 29 Illinois 4-2 in the first round. The No. 41 Rams, who received an at-large tournament invitation for the third time in four years, ended the season 13-8. The match marked the end of the season for one of our show's staff physicians," said Hunter, who is beginning her second season with the show. "You have a smart approach to emergency medicine."

Hunter's visit here was arranged through, Jim Johnson, to, M.D., chair of emergency medicine in the School of Medicine. Ornato, who is known nationally and internationally for his research in the field, was contacted by a California emergency medical physician, Mark Monroe, M.D., who serves as a medical adviser to "ER."

When Ornato learned Morocco wanted Hunter to get her feet wet in MCV Hospitals' emergency department, he was pleased that he and his staff could offer factual input into the medical scenario in "ER."

"This show tends to overly dramatize and sensationalize emergency departments instead of representing the true professional care that is provided," Ornato said. "We can help provide a reality check for such writers." Hunter spent day and evening shifts in the trauma and other treatment areas, including the pediatric emergency unit. She was particularly impressed with the department's close collaboration with the city's EMS system, the chest-pain triage initiative, the department's patient volume and the overall level of care provided.

"Excellent patient evaluation and discharge instructions - day or night - there seemed to be a real level of commitment among the doctors and nurses here," she said.

According to Hunter, the show's writers and actors share a commitment to portraying the medical aspects of the show as accurately as possible. She said writers frequently visit Los Angeles hospitals during production and travel further in the off-season.

"There is no substitute for placing yourself in the environment you're writing about to make a scene more realistic. You notice things - small details that can enhance a particular situation," Hunter said. "Our physicians consultants also scour the country, attending conferences and meeting up with medical journals to make sure we're aware of the latest developments in emergency medicine."

During her recent trip East, Hunter also visited two New York hospitals while another writer canvassed hospitals in the Midwest. Hunter credits the actors for bringing the medical scenarios to life.

"Learning the lingo, running the codes correctly - are all reasons why people like the show and why it has lasted so long ... but it also is drama, so sometimes we fudge things just a bit."

Although this is Hunter's first foray into writing for a show with such a heavy medical theme, she's no stranger to the healthcare field. Her father is a pediatrician and her mother is a nurse. Hunter is reluctant to divulge any details about upcoming episodes that might be based on her observations at VCU. From her office back in Hollywood, she said the staff is reviewing material right now, trying to figure out what will keep viewers hooked this fall. "Hopefully our docs [characters] will be as committed as yours. How's that for a tease?"

Chemistry Professor Organizes International Symposium on Biomedical Polymers

by Mary Beth Alfourd
University News Services

VCU Chemistry Professor Raphael M. Ottobriner, Ph.D., along with scientists and engineers from Italy, Israel, and Japan, organized the Fourth International Symposium on Frontiers in Biomedical Polymers, held May 16-19 in Williamsburg. More than 120 people from 17 countries participated in the conference that brought together scientists and leaders in biomaterials and other medical fields.

The conference integrated speeches and presentations from scientists working in biomedical polymers and their applications, and included the discussion of recent significant developments in bioengineering, chemistry, biochemistry, biology, and medicine.

VCU School of Medicine professors Gary Bowlin, Ph.D., and Anthony Giuseppe-Ellie, Ph.D., presented keynote addresses. Other VCU faculty members presenting papers included engineering professors Eugene Baland, Ph.D., El Rafaie Kenaway, Ph.D., and Gary Wnek, Ph.D., engineering professors Eugene Baland, Ph.D., chemistry professor David Muddiman, Ph.D., chemistry professor D.G. Simpson, Ph.D., anatomy and Kristin Paikowski, bio- medical engineering doctoral candidate also presented papers. Past conferences were held in Italy, Israel and Japan.

Business School Programs Teach Local Students

by Mary Beth Alfourd
University News Services

Virginia schoolchildren from first to 12th grade came to campus this spring to demonstrate their ability to manage money as savvy consumers, understand how international issues impact the economy or invest wisely in the stock market. Three competitions in these areas were sponsored by the Virginia Council on Economic Education and the VCU Center for Economic Education, both housed in the School of Business.

"There's no better way for students to learn about topics such as the stock market or their rights as consumers than to create opportunities where they are facing with making the same decisions as would be in the real world," said Suzanne Gal- lagher, director of VCU's Center for Economic Education. "In March, VCU hosted Lifelines, a consumer issues contest, for the sixth year running. Sixty high-school students from around the state competed online answering questions about personal finance, technology, health and safety, the environment, and government and community responsibilities. A 4-H team from Williamsburg, Va., won the national competition, where it advanced to the semi-final round.

In April, VCU hosted the first Economics Challenge in the state of Virginia, a competition that took economics tests, 24 teams with a total of 120 students qualified. At the competition opening, VCU Rector Edward Flippin, J.D., applauded the students' interest in the economy and assured them that they would use this information for the rest of their lives.

After completing written tests on microeconomics, macroeconomics and international issues, the top two teams competed in a "brain-bowl." The Clover Hill High School team advanced to the East Coast regional competition in Boston, where the Richmond students placed second.

In May, E.G. Miller, Ph.D., associate dean of the School of Business, recognized the winners of the VCU Virginia Council on Economic Education Stock Market Game. Winning teams came from Chesterfield County, Henrico County, the City of Richmond and Collegiate Schools.

The 10-week investment simulation has been sponsored by the VCEE and the School of Business for 25 years. Each team, with members from grades four through 12, begins with a $100,000 investment that uses real-world prices. Students monitor political and economic events that may affect their investments. Manchester High School won the local and state competition.
PERFORMANCES


Aug. 1—"Summer Concert: Blues Works." Sponsored by Student Commons and Activities. Free. For details, call 828-3648. Noon/Student Commons Plaza

WORKSHOPS

July 25—"Weight Watchers at Work." Sponsored by Employee Health Services and Worklife Resources. Fee, new members welcome. For details, contact Jacqueline Paul at 828-1698 or jfpaul@vcu.edu. Noon/MCV campus, call for location

July 26—"Weight Watchers at Work." Sponsored by Employee Health Services and Worklife Resources. Fee, new members welcome. For details, contact Janet Howell at 828-0992 or jhowell@vcu.edu. Noon/Student Commons

July 26—"The New Driving Laws and Your Teenager." Sponsored by VCU Worklife Resources. For details, call 828-1698 or ccwlife@vcu.edu. Noon/Student Commons, Capital Room C

Aug. 1—"Weight Watchers at Work." Sponsored by Employee Health Services and Worklife Resources. Fee, new members welcome. For details, contact Jacqueline Paul at 828-1698 or jfpaul@vcu.edu. Noon/MCV campus, call for location

Aug. 8—"Weight Watchers at Work." Sponsored by Employee Health Services and Worklife Resources. Fee, new members welcome. For details, contact Jacqueline Paul at 828-1698 or jfpaul@vcu.edu. Noon/MCV campus, call for location

Aug. 15—"Weight Watchers at Work." Sponsored by Employee Health Services and Worklife Resources. Fee, new members welcome. For details, contact Jacqueline Paul at 828-1698 or jfpaul@vcu.edu. Noon/MCV campus, call for location

Aug. 15—"Tompkins-McCaw Library Tour and Orientation." Sponsored by VCU Libraries. 10 a.m./Tompkins-McCaw Library First Floor Service Desk

Aug. 22—"Weight Watchers at Work." Sponsored by Employee Health Services and Worklife Resources. Fee, new members welcome. For details, contact Jacqueline Paul at 828-1698 or jfpaul@vcu.edu. Noon/MCV campus, call for location

SPORTS

Aug. 20—VCU Women's Soccer vs. Campbell University 5 p.m./Sports Backers Stadium

Aug. 24—VCU Women's Soccer vs. Olds­side, NY F.C. 7 p.m./Sports Backers Stadium

Aug. 26—VCU Field Hockey vs. University of New Hampshire 1 p.m./Cary Street Field

Anderson Gallery Hosts Virginia Watercolor Society Exhibition

This summer, VCU's Anderson Gallery is home to 120 paintings during the 22nd annual Virginia Watercolor Society Exhibition. Continuing through Aug. 11, the juried exhibition features works from artists across the state.

Katherine Chang Lui, an internationally known painter and teacher from California, juried the show. She has received National Endowment for the Arts funding and has chaired jury selection for the National Watercolor Society. "In judging, my only criterion is quality," she said. "But quality is a very difficult word to define. I suppose what matters to me, as a viewer of an artist's work, is his or her commitment to it."

The Virginia Watercolor Society, formed in 1979, is the only statewide organization for watercolor artists in Virginia. This year's exhibition, hosted by the local chapter of VWS, includes 120 paintings selected from more than 700 submissions by 344 members. The gallery's summer hours are Tuesday through Saturday from noon-4 p.m. The exhibition is free and open to the public. For details, call the Anderson Gallery at 828-1522 or visit online at www.vcu.edu/artmuse/gallery.

Service Awards Gift is Limited-Edition Raku Vase

This fall, Service Award recipients with 25 to 45 years of service will be able to choose a limited edition ceramic vase as their gift. The raku vase, designed by local artist Joel Moses, stands about 11 inches high by 8 inches wide and incorporates white crackle, copper and gold-leaf elements. The pottery reflects the theme of this year's Service Awards program that recognizes faculty and staff as the fabric of VCU and the VCU Health System. Because the artist personally handcrafts each vase, a limited number are available for eligible recipients.

Moses received his M.F.A. in ceramics from VCU in 1977. Currently, he teaches art at two Petersburg elementary schools and at Virginia State University. Moses has established a national and international reputation for his work in raku pottery, and his pieces are included in numerous private and corporate collections both here and abroad.

The vase will be on display from August 1-15. Locations and times are listed in the gift brochure, which will be mailed to eligible recipients.