What’s New in Biochemistry

PERSONNEL NEWS:

After 41 years, Richard Cross is retiring. He will be appointed Emeritus SUNY Distinguished Professor and will continue to do some teaching and committee assignments. For those of you who worked with this amazing man, you know that he is the epitome of a scholar, gentleman, and true friend. His ability to mentor faculty, staff, and students is legendary. He recognized what departmental members needed and was willing to assist them in any way possible in order for them to succeed. His leadership and high standards have created a strong, harmonious department where people feel valued and appreciated. Please join us in wishing Rich well in his retirement.

Patty Kane commented “When Rich first called to offer me the job at Upstate, he asked me what position I could play on a softball team. I was a little worried, since I certainly don’t list softball as one of my talents on my c.v. However, despite my softball deficiencies, Rich has mentored me at every stage of my career from Assistant Professor through promotion and tenure and service as Department Chair. He has a talent for seeing people’s potential and helping them to see their own abilities. I have benefited from this talent countless times. Rich encourages people to do their best science, and always did everything in his power to give them the tools they needed. I continue to seek his wise counsel and encouragement when I’m not sure what’s next, and I hope to continue to do so!”

Tom Duncan’s comment: “Mentor, boss, colleague, coauthor, and friend – I am privileged that all these are roles that Rich Cross has played in my life and scientific career over the past 30 years. In graduate school, I was inspired by his research on ATP synthase and then fortunate that he served as the external member of my PhD thesis defense. As a post-doc looking for the next step, I asked Rich for letters of recommendation, and he recruited me to help run his lab and establish the bacterial ATP synthase system at Upstate. It was his vision and tenacity that drove our most successful experiments, providing the first evidence that ATP synthases work as rotary motors. His encouragement and support were vital in establishing my own funded research program in the department. I can easily say that Rich has provided the greatest positive impacts on my scientific career, and I will continue to treasure his friendship and advice. Enjoy retirement, Rich, but you’re welcome in the lab if you ever get bored!”

David Amberg’s comment: “The first time I met Rich was when he picked me up at the airport for my first interview for a faculty position and I was struck by two things, first that the Chair would pick me up and second that he looked remarkably like Jerry Garcia, not the expected visage for a Chair of Biochemistry. Rich was an outstanding recruiter because of his attention to detail and the personal touch he brought to the process; I bought it hook-line-and-sinker and never looked back, never had regrets in joining his department. This in particular because of the quality of mentoring he provided to his faculty and the undying loyalty he showed to all the members of his department. I have also learned much from watching Rich as an administrator, in particular that he frequently got his way, for the department, by wielding a relentless tenacity to keep hitting the opposing force with well reasoned arguments until they gave up. Lastly, Rich had the ability to be your boss and your
friend, few can pull this off and I have been lucky to be Rich’s dive buddy for the last several years trusting him with my life for over 200 hours underwater; that’s friendship. Here’s to a great scientist, a fantastic mentor, a champion for his faculty, and my friend: Happy Retirement Rich!”

Stewart Loh noted: “Like many other faculty in the Biochemistry department recruited by Rich Cross, I first met him on a snowy mid-winter evening in the Syracuse airport. He managed to look dignified, welcoming, and scruffy all at the same time—every bit what I envisioned the chair of my potentially future department to be. From the warm dinner with him and his family at Scotch ’N Sirloin that night in 1996 to the 2014 iteration of the legendary Biochemistry Christmas party at Lemon Grass, Rich has been for me the heart of the department. I particularly remember the wonderful but ironically-named vertical wine tasting he hosted for me and my fellow new recruit Dave Amberg, at the end of which I was neither vertical nor in possession of an intact uvula. Rich is gifted with considerable power of persuasion and I admire him most for applying it to relentlessly advocate, cheerlead, negotiate, and get in down-and-dirty fights for our department. The extent to which the Biochemistry department grew and prospered under his leadership is hard to overstate. Through gentle tenacity he gets his way more often than not, and we are all tremendously grateful for that.”

David Turner’s comment: “Rich Cross is a person of vision who appreciates that the realization of that vision demands sustained and painstaking attention to detail. In his long years as department chair, Rich continued his quest to understand the inner workings of F₀F₁. By the time he stepped down as chair, Rich and his group had made important contributions toward achieving his vision of more than forty years, resulting in a satisfying understanding of oxidative phosphorylation in molecular detail. Rich’s diagram of the processes involved became the standard; it’s in all the textbooks.

Many medical school department chairs manage to have successful research careers by devoting most departmental resources to their own research projects. But that was not Rich’s way — for which I’m personally very grateful. Instead, he committed himself to building an excellent department composed of promising, creative investigators who would interact effectively while pursuing diverse cutting-edge interests. Rich set out to achieve this second vision in the same way as the first: with unrelenting attention to detail. Our department’s procedures (in such areas as faculty searches, setting up new hires, faculty advising, tenure review, and teaching assignments) were exemplary. In his years as chair, Rich faced several difficult challenges. He met them fairly but resolutely. He provided consistent, reliable leadership. And he did build a department that was much stronger than the one he took over.

People outside our department don’t always “get” Rich. They often remark on his “stubbornness.” I think this just reflects the same thoroughness that Rich brings to everything he takes on. If Rich is on a committee, he’s always prepared. He will have thought things through. He will often present a carefully marshaled argument. And he will tend to repeat that argument, point for point, until somebody who disagrees really engages with his argument and offers a plausible refutation. (And how often does that happen?)

I know of too many horror stories of academic chairs who’ve been too distracted, unwilling to devote the time needed to do the job right. I’m very grateful to Rich for his seriousness of purpose and for his friendship and support over 35 years.”

Here is an email that was sent to departmental members and alumni previously. This will provide more history of Rich’s accomplishments:

Dear Friends,

After 41 years of service to Upstate Medical University, Dr. Richard Cross will be retiring on December 31, 2014. In recognition of Rich’s impact on Upstate, we are raising funds to establish the Richard L. Cross, Jr., PhD, Biochemistry and Molecular Biology Fund.

This new fund will be used, in part, to commission a portrait of Rich to be displayed in Weiskotten Hall. The portrait will inspire those who know Rich to
continue his work and motivate those who may not know him, but who also aspire to long and successful careers at Upstate.

As you know, Rich has had a major impact on the university mission. Since his appointment in 1973, his contributions include his service as Chair of the Biochemistry and Molecular Biology department for 27 years, Chair of Microbiology and Immunology for two years, and Interim Chair of Neuroscience and Physiology during critical times of transition in those departments.

A tireless advocate for research, Rich has mentored junior faculty and students in many departments across the university. His research on the ATP synthase was funded continuously by NIH for almost 30 years, and he held an NIH MERIT Award for a number of years. His work on the mechanism of the ATP synthase is internationally recognized, and he and his lab contributed to the 1997 Nobel Prize-winning research of Paul Boyer.

In 2007, Rich was named a SUNY Distinguished Professor, the highest academic honor accorded by SUNY. In this capacity, he has continued to expand his mentoring efforts across SUNY campuses.

Please join me and the department in honoring Rich by making a gift to the Richard L. Cross, Jr., PhD, Biochemistry and Molecular Biology Fund. Your gift, in any amount, will be greatly appreciated.

Thank you,

Patricia M. Kane, PhD
Chair, Biochemistry and Molecular Biology

Please donate online at www.foundationforupstate.org/cross

Or

Mail your check to:
Upstate Foundation
750 E. Adams Street/CAB 326
Syracuse, NY 13210
Please make your check payable to Richard L. Cross, Jr., PhD, Biochemistry and Molecular Biology Fund (#12770)

PUBLICATIONS:


http://nar.oxfordjournals.org/content/42/22/13674.long

AWARDS, RECOGNITIONS, AND OTHER ACTIVITIES:

Stephen Shinksy presented a poster entitled "A non-active-site SET domain surface crucial for the interaction of MLL1 and the RbBP5/Ash2L heterodimer within MLL family core complexes" at the ASBMB Special Symposia on Transcriptional Regulation Chromatin and RNA Polymerase II in Snowbird, Utah on October 2-6, 2014.

Yaxin Liu was awarded a Keystone Symposia Future of Science Fund scholarship ($1,200), which she will use to attend the upcoming Keystone Symposium on "Mitochondria, Metabolism and Heart Failure", January 27 - February 1, 2015, in Santa Fe, New Mexico.

PERSONAL NEWS:

Yaxin Liu placed fifth (153 miles) on the student leader board for Upstate's Walktober. She was Upstate's top student walker.

NEWS ABOUT ALUMNI:

Here is a recent picture of Bob West’s granddaughter, Issy, who is ready for her first Halloween.

David Turner’s son, Christian, and his wife, Victoria Howard, became parents of twins on October 17th. Solomon weighed 5 lbs., 15 oz. and Xanthe weighed 4 lbs., 14 oz. For Nancy and David, they are their fourth and fifth grandchildren. Mother and kids all doing well.

Dr. Jonathan Nardozzi (Gino Cingolani’s graduate student) and his wife, Camila, welcomed a son, Nicolas “Nico” Jesse Nardozzi, on August 16th. Thank you to Rebecca Oot for sharing the information and photos.