

Point of View

THE EYE RESEARCH INSTITUTE UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

When old friends get together, it is usually a time for renewing acquaintances, exchanging stories, meeting new members of the family, and reminiscing about good times. The activities and events throughout the June 8-10, 2007 visit of friends and board members of the Retina Research Foundation (RRF) in Houston, TX to the UW Eye Research Institute (ERI) fostered this same spirit. Hosted by **Alice R. McPherson, MD**, President and founder of the RRF and a UW alumna, the weekend provided many opportunities for education, discussion, and enjoyment.

Members of the RRF Board—**John C. Dawson, Jr.**, **L. Henry Gissel, Jr.**, **Walter H. Helmerich**, with his wife **Peggy**, **Bettie Harding Lee**, **F. Ames Smith**, and **R. Malcolm Wooley**—attended the weekend’s events, traveling from Colorado, Oklahoma and Texas to participate. In addition, **Gil and Dana Petri**, friends of the Retina Research Foundation, and **Roger Q. Beck** and **Ron Webster** of the Houston law firm FizerBeck joined the group. **Carolyn Mata** and **Patricia Wilson**, Dr. McPherson’s staff members at the RRF and in her clinical office, respectively, provided key support during the planning and execution of the events.

Why would busy people from halfway across the country devote a weekend of their free time to come to Madison to attend scientific talks and social events? First, the mission of the Retina Research Foundation is to reduce blindness due to retinal disease by funding programs in research and education; the mission of the ERI is to bring together researchers and scholars from diverse scientific, medical and other academic backgrounds committed to increasing the understanding of normal vision and of eye diseases. The two organizations clearly speak the same language and are committed to the same goals.



Clockwise from top: Alice McPherson, MD, shares a moment with Daniel Albert, MD; John Dawson, Jr., Ron Webster, Roger Beck, and David Walsh meet; RRF friends Gil and Dana Petri, Bettie Harding Lee, and F. Ames Smith enjoy the event.



In addition, the RRF has provided significant grant support to UW scientists over many years, and has endowed several professorships and chairs at the UW. The weekend’s events provided a unique opportunity for the RRF members to meet some of the scientists they have funded, and to have one-on-one conversations with them about their work and their scientific goals—and for the scientists to get to know the people who help to provide financial support for their work.

Second, the RRF and the ERI both understand that diseases know no geographical boundaries and neither will their cures. Both organizations foster partnerships to advance research into vision-threatening conditions, and the philanthropy of the RRF and the outstanding research of UW’s vision scientists form a strong symbiotic match.

The UW ERI currently holds three professorships supported by the RRF. Professorships are named for the RRF donors who created them: **Edwin and Dorothy Gamewell**, **Rebecca Meyer Brown**, and **M.D. Matthews**. In addition, an endowed chair, known as the Retina Research



Clockwise from left: Peggy and Walter Helmerich at dinner; RRF’s R. Malcolm Wooley meets UW Provost Pat Farrell, Val Johnson, and Don Gray; Alice McPherson, MD, and UW Chancellor John Wiley renew their acquaintance.





Clockwise from top: Arthur Polans, PhD, Pat and Oscar Boldt; Sandy Wilcox and L. Henry Gissel; Alice McPherson, MD, and Audrey Walsh; Sakae Ikeda, DVM, and John Dawson, Jr.



Foundation **Emmett A. Humble** Distinguished Directorship, supports the research of the Eye Research Institute's director. In addition to these awards, the RRF has consistently provided well over \$100,000 each year in competitive grant awards to UW faculty studying various aspects of retinal disease.

Shortly after the RRF group's arrival on Friday afternoon, guests gathered for a reception and formal dinner at the Maple Bluff Country Club. Maple Bluff Country Club holds a special place in

Right: Mark Lefebvre jests with Rose Barroilhet; Below: Arthur Polans, PhD, Tracy Perkins, Alice McPherson, MD, Daniel Albert, MD, with the plaque honoring Tony Mierzwa; Right: Karen Roth, ERI Advisory Board members Harry Roth, MD, and Tom Dow, MD, and Suzanne Dow had a delightful evening.



the heart of Dr. McPherson, who met her late husband, **Tony Mierzwa**, at the Club. Tony was the Club's golf pro from 1939 to 1959. A plaque in his memory was presented to Dr. McPherson prior to the reception to be installed in the Club's Pro Shop.

Guests at the reception and dinner included UW **Chancellor John Wiley** and **Provost Pat Farrell**, both of whom have been instrumental in the creation and development of the UW Eye Research Institute. The UW Foundation's President **Sandy Wilcox** and Vice Presidents **Mark Lefebvre** and **Don Gray** each spoke at the dinner about the value and impact of the RRF-ERI partnership. Members of the ERI's Advisory Board were also present to meet their counterparts from Houston, and included **Rose Barroilhet**, **Patricia and Oscar C. Boldt**, **Derilyn Cattelino**, **Tom Dow, MD**, **Ken Frazier**, **Harry Roth, MD**, and **David Walsh**, as well as ERI's administrative leaders, **Daniel Albert, MD, MS**, Director, **Arthur Polans, PhD**, Associate Director, and **Tracy Perkins, MPH**, Administrative Director.

Nine UW scientists presented talks on Saturday morning, highlighting recent advances in vision research and discussing promising avenues for future investigation. Speakers included **Margaret McFall-Ngai, PhD**, **David Gamm, MD, PhD**, **Nansi Colley, PhD**, **Akihiro Ikeda, DVM, PhD**, **Daniel Albert, MD, MS**, **Nader Sheibani, PhD**, **Michele Basso, PhD**, **Nicola Ferrier,**



PhD, and **Arthur Polans, PhD**. These speakers were representative of the more than forty faculty from various departments, schools and colleges on the UW campus who participate as members of the Eye Research Institute.

Alan Fish, Associate Vice-Chancellor for Facilities Planning and Management, joined the group after a luncheon in the atrium of the Health Sciences Learning Center, presented an overview of the UW-Madison campus master plan, and drew attention to the development of coordinated "academic neighborhoods" with greater physical harmony. Fish guided a tour of campus featuring stem cell laboratories, the new microbial sciences building slated to open this fall, and a glimpse of the proposed future site of an Eye Research Institute building.

Saturday's events were capped off by a celebratory dinner at the Madison Club, where scientists and RRF guests were able to informally discuss all that had been presented during the day.

Since its inception in 1969, the RRF has provided educational and research support for vision scientists who are working to eradicate eye disease. Their partnership with the UW Eye Research Institute expands opportunities to link scientists from widely different disciplines who are engaged in the development of new knowledge and innovative approaches related to vision problems and their treatments. As Winston Churchill said, "If we are together, nothing is impossible," and the friendship forged between the RRF and the UW Eye Research Institute seems destined to be a partnership for success.



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