The Rockefeller University has chosen The Principal Financial Group, a 129-year-old financial services company headquartered in Des Moines, Iowa, to take over the administration of its self-insured health plan, dental plan and flexible spending accounts. Principal has taken over claims processing for expenses incurred after January 1, 2008 from 21st Century Health and Benefits, which has been the university’s claims administrator since 1998.

Though the switch to a new administrator means claims will be reviewed and paid by a new team of processors, the move does not change the benefits offered to Rockefeller employees or the services or doctor networks covered under the Rockefeller University health plan. In addition, mail-order prescriptions filled under the Rockefeller University plan will continue to be processed by Express Scripts as they have been in the past.

Rockefeller has historically had renew able one-year contracts with its health benefit administrators, and the Benefits Office, part of Human Resources, reviews the contracts each year to ensure they are maintaining a high level of service. In 2007, after 21st Century was acquired by a much larger firm dealing principally with large government clients, Fringe Benefits Management Company, HR felt the time was right to undertake a broad, more systematic review of such contracts to ensure the university’s claims administrator was best serving the community’s needs. “Our emphasis in choosing an administrator is on service,” says Ginny Hansen, director of benefits. “It’s important that claims are processed quickly and accurately. Customer service personnel are capable of effectively speaking with and serving our diverse community.”

“Working with an international human resources consulting firm, Mercer, HR identified 11 companies capable of delivering benefits administration services. The firms included both insurance companies, such as Oxford Health Plans, which provides the university’s managed care plan but can also administer self-funded plans, and third-party administrators, such as 21st Century and Principal, which process claims on their clients’ behalf. Over three months last year, HR personnel conducted site visits, interviewed key personnel, examined financial disclosure statements and checked references of the companies.

Principal was selected primarily because of its experience providing claims administration to small organizations, particularly hospitals and research facilities in which plan participants have a very high level of knowledge about health care. At Principal, our claims and inquiries will be handled by a single group of seven processors,” says Virginia Huffman, vice president for human resources. “It’s appealing to us that phone calls are not routed through large call centers as they are at many national vendors.” Other benefits of Principal are faster turnaround of claims, a nursing staff that can provide medical support for those who need assistance, a more robust Web site and the option of direct deposit for flexible spending account reimbursements.

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Mr. Joe Nekola sets sail
Former director of security retires to a life on the high seas
by TALLEY HENNING BROWN

At the hour of five, most university offices close up shop for the night. Security, however, is a 24/7 business, and for the last 18 years, Joseph Nekola kept operations running smoothly. Mr. Nekola, who left Rockefeller University at the end of January for semireirement, will soon be running operations of a different sort — captaining his trowler motor yacht, exploring the Atlantic Sea Board.

Mr. Nekola has worked in security — public and private — for more than four decades. Born and raised in the Bronx, he attended American River College in Sacramento, California, before returning to the East Coast and entering the Police Academy in 1963. His talents were quickly recognized, and he received the Bloomingdale Trophy — an engraved .38-caliber pistol — for attaining the highest overall average of academic, physical training and marksmanship. While working in the New York Police Department, he furthered his education at John Jay College of Criminal Justice and Iona College. During his 25 years as one of New York’s finest, he was assigned to the Tactical Police Force (the precursor to the SWAT unit), was promoted to sergeant, lieutenant and captain, and served with various patrol and investigative units, including the Major Case Squad and the Bronx District Attorney’s Detective Squad, for both of which he was commanding officer.

In 1989, Mr. Nekola was hired as director of Rockefeller University security by President Joshua Lederberg, and he has served in that capacity through the administrations of six Rockefeller presidents. “I will miss everything about Rockefeller. The people who work here — academics and staff — who are so impressive in their dedication to the university and their work. Of course I will miss my numerous friends here, but thankfully I will be able to continue these friendships,” Mr. Nekola says. “I will also miss being here to witness and enjoy our beautiful campus as it adjusts to the changes in the seasons each year.”

Mr. Nekola is leaving an impressive mark on the campus himself, however. Among his proudest accomplishments of his years at Rockefeller, Mr. Nekola is making sure I don’t forget that the authorities react to them. Events have much to teach us as far as how to stay informed about events happening everywhere in the world — like the spate of terrorist activities in Asia and the Middle East the last few years — because those events have much to teach us as far as how the authorities react to them. “What is most important to me, though, is making sure I don’t forget that the

Mr. Nekola will continue part time in the security field and risk assessment consulting, but he’ll spend the majority of his time on the sea, his yacht and his home. He plans to complete the requirements for the United States Coast Guard master 100-ton license next month, and then he’ll begin a three-year cruise from the Florida Keys and the Bahamas to Nova Scotia. “Then I’ll decide whether to move on to the Caribbean and South America. But during these adventures there will be numerous trips back here to see friends,” he says.

“Will be greatly missed,” says Assistant Director of Security Michael John, who has worked with Mr. Nekola for 18 years. “He is a great leader. He was on top of everything going on at the university, but he took the time to be genuinely involved with his staff. He was concerned about us personally and professionally, and was eager to help with any kind of problem. I know I am not alone in these thoughts.”

I stay informed about events happening elsewhere in the world — like the spate of terrorist activities in Asia and the Middle East the last few years — because those events have much to teach us as far as how the authorities react to them. “What is most important to me, though, is making sure I don’t forget that the

organization is run by people — that those people are the most important entity in the organization,” Mr. Rogers says. “One thing I do think I will do is keep my music away from the lab members and will do my best to keep us all out of any sort of trouble.”

Mr. Nekola will begin moving his laboratory to Zurich this August, and four of his current lab members will make the move with him over the following few months: students Rosa Barreire Da Silva and Till Strowig, and postdocs Monique Gannage and Sonja Meixlsperger. The laboratory in the Délétre W. Bronk Research Building will remain open for the duration of the move, unless much greater space is required.

“Rockefeller is a very special place, and I will miss it greatly. The light load of administrative duties here and the high degree of scientific independence are things that are not easily replicated at other institutions,” Mr. Nekola says. “I will miss the many collaborative relationships I have built here over the past decade, and I will certainly miss New York City as well.”
$400,000 grant creates new fund for translational research at Rockefeller

by TALLEY HENNING BROWN

With a $400,000 grant from the Achelis and Bodman Foundations, Rockefeller University’s Bridges to Better Medicine Forum has launched a new fund devoted to advancing translational research that is on the cusp of commercial viability. The Technology Innovation Fund will finance four short-term projects a year, each with $30,000 to $70,000. The Office of Scientific and Facility Operations, which is administering the fund, began accepting proposals this week. The second annual review is expected to award its first projects by March 15.

The Technology Innovation Fund is aimed at research that is no longer in its early stages but has not yet been developed into a market-ready product — research that is particularly difficult to fund through traditional sources.

“The National Institutes of Health and other such organizations offer very few individual funding opportunities for this kind of research, because they don’t consider it basic research. Similarly, industry resources like pharmaceutical and medical technology companies don’t want to fund something until there’s a product they can market,” says Associate Vice President for Technology Transfer Kathleen Denis.

“With this kind of dedicated funding, we’re posed to give these important projects the push they need to continue.”

Grants may pay for further experimental data, for example, or to reduce an invention to practice, enable a successful patent application or make a technology more commercially interesting to investors.

Project proposals will be judged along several criteria, including novelty, proof of concept, feasibility and market potential. Proposals will be reviewed and chosen by a committee of life sciences, industry and investing professionals: Peter Goodfellow, independent scientific and executive advisor at GlaxoSmithKline and a Rockefeller University visiting scholar in 2007; Teena Lerner, Rockefeller alumna and founding head of hedge fund management firm Rx Capital; Paul Maddon, member of The Rockefeller University Council, former Howard Hughes Medical Institute researcher and founding executive of Progenics Pharmaceuticals; and Lewis Sanders, Rockefeller University trustee and CEO and chairman of investment research firm AllianceBernstein.

Established in 2003, the Bridges to Better Medicine Forum encourages knowledge exchange among scientists and investors, and arts and industry executives, for the purpose of advancing “bench-to-bedside” research. With the seed grant, the Bridges initiative is now contributing to the research enterprise at Rockefeller.

Campus News

A storeroom, transformed

Child and Family Center’s newly opened art studio offers kids a place to be creative

by TALLEY HENNING BROWN

Art is a messy business, but the kids at the Child and Family Center have a new handle on it. The CFC’s new art studio, created last fall in what used to be a storage room, gives kids in the university’s child care facility a dedicated place to express their creativity — without staining the carpet.

Funded by $25,000 in private donations from the university’s Women & Science program, renovations to the space were done entirely by Plant Operations personnel; the room’s furniture was paid for by the Parents’ Association. “What I really like about this is how excited everyone is about having this dedicated space,” says CFC Director Marjorie Goldsmith. “It’s hard enough for elementary and even secondary schools in this country to hold onto their art programs, but it’s actually rare for an early-childhood program to have one, and we do.”

The studio’s design reflects more consideration than just the need for kid-sized sinks and chairs. Paints and colored pencils and other supplies are organized by color or shape with an eye toward inspiring students to be thoughtful about the medium they choose. Shelves are laid out with groupings of singular objects found (by the kids, of course) in nature — a basket of pinecones on one shelf, a bowl of round stones on another. The room is relatively small, with elbow space for only a few at a time. The old kids’ room’s view to the window was blocked by shelves, but now, Ms. Goldsmith explains, is part of the point: “Many of our activities with the kids are like that,” she says. “The kids are here for as long as eight or nine hours a day, and they need more than just large-group activity. There’s a pretty universal attitude here that we don’t want these kids to just have full-time babysitting, we want this to be a fully educational environment.”

The CFC’s educational objective is defined along the lines of the Reggio Emilia Approach, an early-childhood educational philosophy created in the 1940s in Italy and now followed by many American preschools. The approach is characterized by its attention to different learning styles, the significance it places on children’s self-expression and its recasting of the teacher’s role as that of a practicing artist and art therapist.

Works by Rockefeller’s young artists-in-residence are regularly on display along the entrance wall of the Weiss Café, but the kids have already garnered attention from the larger community. On the first weekend in November, the Barnes and Noble bookstore at East 86th Street and Second Avenue helped raise funds for the studio by donating 15 percent of any purchase made by someone who mentioned the CFC. The proceeds — about $180 — went toward art books for the studio. And a recent field trip to the Museum of Modern Art illustrated the success of the program: when the Rockefeller kids recognized Claude Monet’s Water Lilies. “It was the most wonderful thing to see these young children who not only knew something about the Monets but were so excited to see them in person,” says Ms. Goldsmith. “They totally surprised all the calm, quiet adults in the room.”

A new seminar series

(continued from page 1)

Principal (continued from page 1)

the old one is all that’s required.”

In addition to the PHCS network, doctors in the Well Cornell Physician Organization — which includes most doctors who practice full-time at Weill Medical College of Cornell University — will continue to be covered in-network. The addition of the Well Cornell network to the Rockefeller health plan was negotiated last fall after the Well Cornell doctors’ group dropped PHCS (then known as Multiplan). “Since so many of our people use Well Cornell doctors, we felt it was important to try to work out an arrangement where they would continue to be covered in-network, and it was critical that we were able to preserve this relationship with the move to Principal,” says Ms. Huffman.
Awards:
Lu Bai, postdoc in Frederick Gross’s Labora-
tory of Molecular Genomics & Metabolism.

The 2015 Ernst Jung Prize for Medicine is awarded to Peter Ludwig and the Jung Foundation for Science.

The 2015 Karl Heinz Beckurts Prize for cleaning science is awarded to Nils Marklund and the Beckurts Foundation.

The 2015 Max Delbrück Award for scientific research is awarded to Dr. Martin E. Williams and the Max Delbrück Center for Molecular Medicine.

Promoted (academic appointments):
Nathalie Blachere, from research assistant to research associate, Robert Darnell Lab.
Marc-Werner Dobenecker, from postdoctoral associate to research associate, Tarakhovsky Lab.
Luisa Miranda Figueiredo, from postdoctoral fellow to research associate, Nishimura Lab.
Jerome Flavell, from postdoctoral fellow to associate, Tarakhovsky Lab.
Arnaud Lacoste, from postdoctoral associate to research associate, Brivanlou Lab.
Anura Rambukkana, from research assistant to professor, Rock Lab.

Hired:
Adewale Adenuga, laboratory helper, Puch Lab.
John Agapiou, postdoctoral associate, Mag- nello Lab.
Reitu Agrawal, manager of administration and operations, Rice Lab.
Thomas Allen, mechanics, Housing Scholars Residence.
Laura Banaszynski, postdoctoral associate, Allos Lab.
John Betzup, postdoctoral fellow, Geregard Lab.
William Beltran Argueta, animal attendant, CDC.
Kristina Bollas, archival assistant, Archive Center.
Kayne Chan, inventory control clerk, Purchas-
ing.
Luis Chaves, postdoctoral associate, Gaddib Lab.
Mitchell Cabrini, security guard, Security.
Hongzhong Dai, postdoctoral fellow, Chua Lab.
Yue de Jonge, visiting fellow, Rice Lab.
Beat Fierz, postdoctoral fellow, Muir Lab.
Jonathan Fisher, postdoctoral fellow, Had- spe Lab.
Janine Fierl, manuscript coordinator, Rockefeller University Press.
Clement Gomes, security guard, Security.
Adriana Gonzalez, research associate, Kruger Lab.
Kenneth Gorlick, member of the adjunct faculty, Fischetti Lab.
Sarah Hache, laboratory technician, Brivan- lou Lab.

Milestones

Alicia Darnell’s achievement, at the age of 17, is an especially remarkable credit to an already remarkable family.

Alicia Darnell is the granddaughter of Professor Emeritus Thomas Tuschl, presented in Munich December 7, 2007.

Family tradition. Alicia Darnell receiving her Siemens scholarship (left), and having tea with her family (from left: Jennifer, Bob and Jim) in Paul Nobile’s office in December.


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