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The Rockefeller University

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# news & notes

March 24, 1995 Volume 5, Number 22

The Rockefeller University

## Council member Benjamin Weiss bequeaths \$10 million to university for faculty development

Courtesy of Irma Weiss



Benjamin Weiss, who was an investment advisor, left the university a bequest of over \$10 million in his will.

The Rockefeller University has received a bequest valued at over \$10 million from Benjamin Weiss, a member of The Rockefeller University Council. The gift will support the new initiatives program for faculty recruitment. In recognition of the contribution, the fourth largest in the university's history, Rockefeller will rename the Tower Building as the Benjamin and Irma G. Weiss Research Building.

"Ben was a man of high intelligence and humor who believed in basic research as the key to unraveling the mysteries of disease," said President Torsten Wiesel. "He shared these views with his wife, Irma Weiss, who now serves on the Council and is a familiar face on campus. I am deeply grateful, as are we all at the university, for his magnificent gift, for their generous ser-

vice, and for the confidence his bequest reflects in our university's future."

Ben Weiss, who died in 1992 at the age of 82, was born in Manhattan. Although he became a successful investor, he remained a very private man. As a teenager, he went to France in 1927 to study sculpting. "He soon recognized that he did not possess the talent to pursue his quest, but his love of Paris kept him in France until 1929," his widow recalled in a recent luncheon at Rockefeller. "During those years, he was exposed to art and fine books and they became two of his lifelong passions. He often said, 'I bought my first piece of art when I was 19, and my first car at 37,' establishing very firmly where his priorities lay."

Weiss returned to New York in 1930, opening a rare book shop on West 46th Street, but the Depression changed his plans. A friend introduced him to a brokerage house and thus began his

Tower to be renamed and dedicated in honor of gift

Tower Building will be renamed the Benjamin and Irma G. Weiss Research Building in a ceremony Tues., May 30. Prior to the dedication, the lobby will be refurbished, as other improvements continue.

See page 2 for renovation plans.

investment career. Fluent in several languages, he eventually headed his firm's Amsterdam office. Weiss returned to the United States a few

See Weiss, page 2

## New York State lieutenant governor to speak on social and fiscal responsibility at Cohn Forum

Courtesy of Betsy McCaughey



Betsy McCaughey, who recently chaired a task force on Medicaid, will address the Cohn Forum Tues., Mar. 28.

Betsy McCaughey, lieutenant governor of New York State, will speak at the Zanvil A. Cohn Forum on Health Affairs Tues., Mar. 28. Her talk is entitled, "Meeting Social Responsibilities in an Era of Fiscal Restraint."

"A historian and a scholar of

government, Betsy McCaughey has recently turned her attention to government's role in providing health care to Americans," said Alex Bearn, chair of the forum's program committee. "Her critique of President Clinton's health-care plan last February, published in *The New Republic*, brought her to prominence and she recently chaired the state's Medicaid Task Force. I know her provocative views will interest the forum."

McCaughey earned a B.A. in 1970 from Vassar College, following it with a Ph.D. from Columbia University, earned in 1976. Her dissertation received the Bancroft Dissertation Award, a prestigious history prize. Other fellowships and honors have included a Woodrow Wilson Fellowship, Herbert H. Lehman Fellowship, John Jay Fellowship, and the Richard B. Morris Prize, as well as a postdoctoral award from the National Endowment for the Humanities. In 1993, she was named a John

See McCaughey, page 2

## Crystallographer to discuss tumor suppressor p53

Nikola Pavletich, head of the Laboratory of Structural Biology of Oncogenes and Tumor Suppressors at the Sloan-Kettering Institute, will speak on "Crystallographic Studies of the p53 Tumor Suppressor Protein" at the Friday lecture today (Mar. 24).

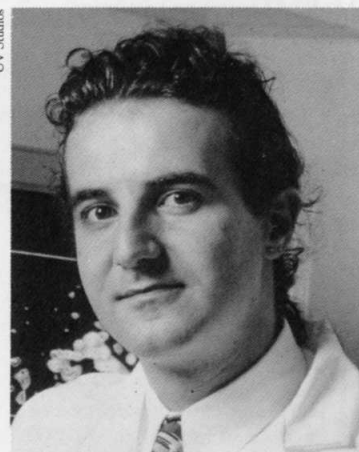
Pavletich and his colleagues use the tools of x-ray crystallography to understand the structural basis of how oncogenes and tumor suppressors function. The gene for the tumor suppressor p53 is the most commonly mutated gene identified in human cancers, but the exact mechanisms by which p53 impedes cell proliferation are unknown. Last year, Pavletich and his co-workers successfully determined the structure of the p53 protein as it binds to DNA in order to suppress the formation of tumors. Pavletich believes that this information may facilitate the design of novel anticancer drugs.

Other areas of research under way in his lab include determination of the structural basis of p53's interaction with the cellular protooncogene MDM-2 and several viral oncogenes such as the simian virus 40 large T antigen and the adenoviruses E1A and E1B.

"Nikola has done some wonderful work on the zinc finger pro-

See Pavletich, page 4

UV Studios



Nikola Pavletich of the Sloan-Kettering Institute gives the Friday lecture today (Mar. 24).

2 Lecture on breast cancer

3 The metabolic method

4 Finders, not keepers

# Tower lobby to be refurbished before renaming ceremony in May

*Decor will feature Stella sculpture, marble seating, redesigned amenities*



**Tower Building will be renamed in honor of the Weiss gift in a ceremony May 30.**

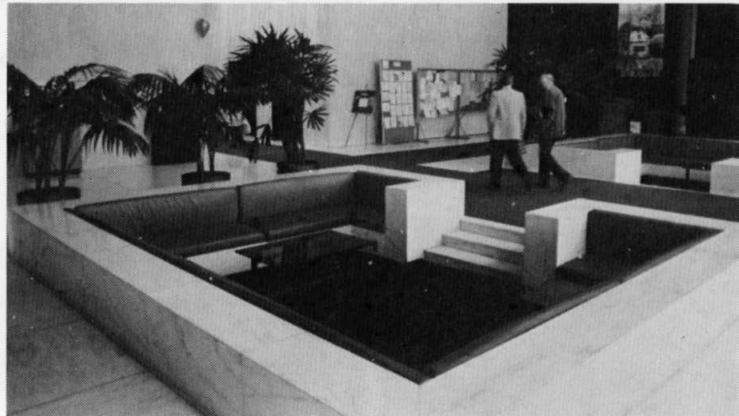
The lobby of Tower Building will be refurbished for the building's dedication on May 30 as the Benjamin and Irma G. Weiss Research Building (see story, page 1).

"This is a modest upgrade and we expect it to cause only minimal disruption to the Tower occupants and to patrons of the Tower Café," said George Candler, director of Planning and Construction.

Renovations begin today (Mar. 24) with preparations for removal of one of the raised benches surrounding the sunken seating areas. A plastic bubble will be erected over the seating area to contain dust generated by the removal, which will begin tomorrow (Mar. 25). The other seating area will be dismantled under a plastic bubble the following weekend.

Work will progress throughout April and May by filling in the seating pits with concrete and covering the areas with carpeting. Marble and movable seating is planned. The sculpture by Frank Stella, previously displayed in the Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Dining Room, will be installed on the west side of the lobby. All the current amenities—phone, coat rack, bulletin boards, Media and library drop-off bins, and display units—will be redesigned. A donor recognition plaque, which will include the names of Benjamin and Irma Weiss as well as the names of benefactors who have provided funds to renovate laboratories in the building, will be installed in the elevator lobby. The new name of the building will be inscribed in bronze lettering above the plaza entrance.

Anyone with questions about the renovation may contact Robert Schill, project manager, x7805.



**The refurbishing of Tower lobby begins today (Mar. 24) with removal of the sunken seating areas, which will be replaced by movable seating. The renovation is scheduled for completion before the May 30 renaming ceremony, to which the university community will be invited.**

## Weiss bequest

*(continued from page 1)*

months before the outbreak of World War II and, with a partner, opened a brokerage firm on Wall Street.

In the 1950s Weiss made the acquaintance of a research scientist working on oral contraception for women. He asked Weiss for financial advice to help him develop this innovative idea. Weiss took the concept to Charles Allen of Allen & Co., and the pill and Syntex were launched. "This chance encounter was the catalyst that triggered Ben's fascination with medicine as a science," said Irma Weiss.

In 1983, Weiss was introduced to the university by his wife through one of her friends. Three years later, Weiss became a member of the Council. "Ben had only the highest regard and respect for the Rockefeller family and their great

commitment to philanthropic causes. We both believed that it was our responsibility to contribute to the betterment of man," said Irma Weiss, who joined the Council in 1993. A graduate of The Cooper Union, Irma Weiss also shared her husband's interest in the arts. Weiss made bequests to a number of museums and libraries; however, his largest gift was reserved for Rockefeller.

The Benjamin and Irma G. Weiss Research Building will be formally rededicated on May 30. The entire campus community will be invited. Renovation of the lobby will begin today (Mar. 24). Additional information about the events will be provided in future *News&Notes*.

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The Rockefeller University is an equal opportunity/affirmative action employer.

## Employee Health Office sponsors lecture on controversies in breast cancer and mammography

The Employee Health Office is sponsoring a talk entitled "Controversies Surrounding Breast Cancer and Mammography" Tues., Mar. 28. The speaker is Deborah Axelrod, physician-in-chief of the Louis Venet, M.D., Comprehensive Breast Service at Beth Israel Medical Center and assistant clinical professor at Albert Einstein College of Medicine.

Axelrod will discuss diagnostic methods and treatment options for breast cancer, including mammography, needle aspiration and excisional biopsy, breast-conserving therapy, and mastectomy with reconstruction options. After the talk, Marcelle Kaplan, the nurse coordinator from the Louis Venet, M.D., Breast Service, will give instruction in performing breast self-examination.

The American Cancer Society estimates that more than 180,000 new cases of breast cancer will be diagnosed this year. Although incidence rates are increasing, the Society credits early detection

and improved treatments for the stable mortality rates over the past 50 years.

The lecture will be held in Caspary Auditorium at noon. All are welcome.

Paula Epstein Bogdol



**Deborah Axelrod will lecture on controversies surrounding breast cancer and mammography Tues., Mar. 28.**

## McCaughey

*(continued from page 1)*

M. Olin fellow at the Manhattan Institute, and in 1994, she was elected lieutenant governor of New York State.

McCaughey has published three books: *From Loyalist to Founding Father*, *Government by Choice*, and *Electing the President*.

The forum on health affairs was established by the late Zandv A. Cohn as a venue for informal discussion on important issues in health research and public policy.

The forum begins at 5:30 P.M. in the Abby Aldrich Rockefeller dining room. Sherry will be served at 5:00 P.M. All are welcome.



# Researchers find evidence that metabolism opposes weight change

Approximately 35 percent of Americans are obese, and the numbers are increasing with each decade. Health care costs directly attributable to obesity are over \$30 billion per year. Americans spend another \$40 billion annually on diet and exercise plans. Yet, as almost anyone who has lost weight can attest, most people who lose weight will return to their previous state of fatness within two years.

An article in the March 9, 1995 issue of the *New England Journal of Medicine* by Rockefeller Associate Professor Rudolph L. Leibel, Assistant Professor Michael Rosenbaum, and Professor Jules Hirsch demonstrates that, contrary to popular belief, there is a clear biologic basis for the tendency for such people to maintain an obese body weight. The study suggests that each of us has a "set point" for body weight. In both obese and lean individuals, the body exerts potent metabolic opposition to any attempt to maintain a weight above or below that point.

## Traveling up and down the scale

Eighteen obese and 23 lean men and women were admitted to the Rockefeller University Clinical Research Center for periods ranging from three to twenty months. They were fed liquid formula diets and their daily caloric intake was adjusted until their weights were stable for four to six weeks. They then underwent a battery of tests including measures of their fat and muscle and of the amount of energy expended while resting, eating, and exercising. "Redundant measures and multiple checks and balances enabled us to be confident of each aspect of these data," explained Leibel.

Subjects were then asked to either gain 10 percent of their weight by eating solid food or to lose 10 or 20 percent by consuming 800 calories per day of formula.

Weight was then stabilized above or below usual on the liquid formula diet and the battery of tests was repeated. Many obese subjects were studied at multiple weight plateaus above and below their usual body weight.

Male or female, thin or fat, the metabolic opposition to the maintenance of an altered body weight was found by the research team to be the same. If a person endeavors to maintain a reduced body weight, the metabolism slows by about 15 percent more than can be accounted for simply by the weight loss. Similarly, if a person endeavors to maintain an elevated body weight, the metabolism increases by about 15 percent beyond expected.

Obese and lean people were remarkably similar in the number of calories (corrected for body size) that they required to maintain their usual body weight. Lean and obese individuals respond similarly to changes from that usual body weight: pounds down, metabolism down; pounds up, metabolism up. Obese people are not cursed with naturally slow metabolisms, nor do they maintain a higher body weight because they are lazy or gluttonous. Rather, they simply "defend" a higher body fat "set point" than those who are lean. "These studies show clearly that obesity has a biologic basis. Obesity is not just a problem of willpower," said Leibel.

## Results from rigor

The investigators found that the metabolic opposition to the maintenance of an altered body weight is due, in part, to apparent changes in the efficiency with which muscle burns calories. "After you lose 10 percent of your weight, you will burn fewer calories in simple activities, like walking a mile," said Rosenbaum.

The editorial that accompanies the *New England Journal of Medicine*

article ranked it with the best evidence for a body weight set-point and characterized the experiment as difficult. The research began at Rockefeller University nearly 10 years ago. Leibel said, "This study exemplifies work that could not be done anywhere else. The changes in metabolism that accompany even small changes in body weight make it almost impossible to isolate the effects of the maintenance of an altered body weight on energy expenditure without the controlled environment that we can provide in this hospital."

Recruiting patients was difficult. Only about 1 in 20 of the volunteers who telephoned were eligible. "Most of the obese people who called were already experiencing morbidities, like diabetes or high blood pressure, which excluded them as possible candidates for the study," said Ellen Murphy, assistant for research. Obese and lean callers who met basic age, health, and weight criteria then underwent intensive medical screening to ascertain that they were healthy enough to endure rapid weight gain and/or loss and that there was no clear medical basis, like thyroid disease, for their obesity. Lastly, Leibel, Rosenbaum, or Hirsch tried to dissuade candidates from participating. Rosenbaum said, "I warned them that they wouldn't be able to eat food or leave the hospital for weeks and that the success rate of obese patients in keeping weight off was no better among our volunteers than anywhere else." After hearing this information and tasting the formula, only one in five people decided to enter the study.

## Volunteers benefit

Obese volunteers were offered long-term outpatient follow-up at the Hospital in an ongoing effort to keep the weight off. "We provided encouragement and nutritional

counseling and, despite such support, most obese subjects returned to their previous weight," said Rosenbaum.

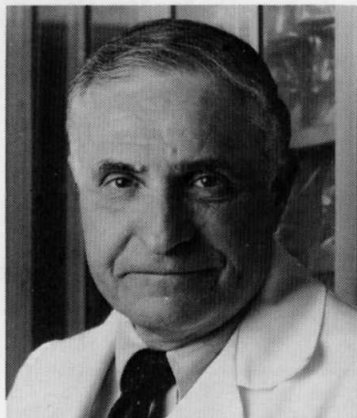
Lean volunteers were paid \$40 per day. Many of them were students who completed research projects in hospital labs and were given work-study college credits for their experience. Volunteer Kelli Johnson said, "I was taught things in the lab that I wouldn't have learned at school, things that aren't even in textbooks yet. Because of this experience, I decided to go into research."

## Muscling in on the mechanism

How is it that a few people do manage to lose weight and keep it off? Rosenbaum would like to study such people, but they are scarce—as the study showed, biology is against them. He said, "The bad news for dieters is that there is a metabolic opposition to the maintenance of a reduced body weight and, to maintain a reduced weight, they will probably have to restrict their calories indefinitely. The good news is that there is a clear biological basis for obesity and the inability to keep weight off should not be viewed as an indication that one lacks willpower."

The study hasn't ended, said Leibel. Based on the findings, the study is now focusing on just how muscle tissue is altered with changes in weight. "We're now doing studies of muscle physiology, morphology, and fiber type in obese and nonobese subjects before and after weight change. We are hoping, ultimately, to integrate our studies of the molecular genetics of weight regulation with these physiologic investigations," he said.

Rosenbaum added, "Losing weight is only the start of the battle. What's important is finding out how to keep the weight off and how to get our bodies to work with us rather than against us in doing it."



Jules Hirsch (left) and Rudolph Leibel (center), heads of lab, and Michael Rosenbaum, assistant professor, have just published an article in the *New England Journal of Medicine* on changes in energy expenditure resulting from altered body weight. At right, Rosenbaum reviews data with Ellen Murphy, assistant for research. The team is following up on their findings with studies on the role of muscle.

## A real find: Rockefeller's lost and found service

When she discovered that her wallet had fallen out of her pocket during a Wildlife Conservation Society lecture in Caspary Auditorium, Tracey Cameron canceled all her credit cards.

"I didn't think of calling Rockefeller about it," said Cameron, an architect who lives downtown. "But then your security people tracked me down and told me it was found. Everything was there, even my \$21."

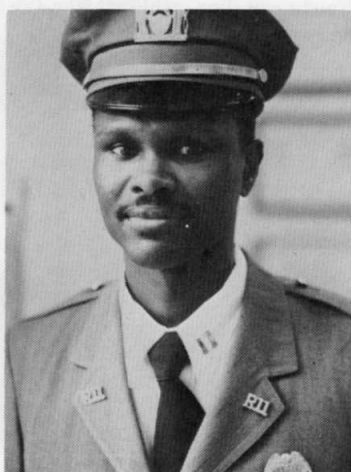
Cameron's story is typical. Rockefeller's lost and found is a little known but thriving service administered by Security.

"I think the most unusual aspect of the lost and found is how honest people here really are," said Joseph Nekola, director of Security. Said Captain Michael John, "People get really excited when we call them to say we've found something."

Every month, Security records about 10 lost or found articles—such as wallets, purses, and "keys, keys, and more keys," said Louise Getting, security guard. Most items are found by the guards, who tour every office, lab, nook, and cranny of the campus every 24 hours. The custodial staff also turns in



Rockefeller's Security staff tracked down architect Tracey Cameron (left) to return her wallet. Captain Michael John said, "People get really excited when we call them to say we've found something."



many items.

No one loses anything terribly unusual at Rockefeller: a drill, a phone bill, a temperature probe. The list bears witness to moments of simple absentmindedness. A diary, a bicycle helmet, a tennis racquet. All these items owners come searching for. Security's files are full of appreciative notes: "I was

'so pleased with your service' and 'Thank you!'"

Which items do owners abandon? Scarves, hats, single gloves, belts, umbrellas, watches, eyeglasses, sunglasses. A lost and found bestows on even the most mundane of items a distinctive honor: Said John, "We keep this stuff forever and ever."

## Pavletich

(continued from page 1)

teins," said Professor Stephen Burley, who will introduce Pavletich. "Today he will discuss the tumor suppressor p53 and its role in cancer."

Pavletich received a Ph.D. from the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine in 1991. As a research associate in Carl Pabo's laboratory at M.I.T., he was the first to determine the structure of the zinc finger family of proteins, the largest family of transcription factors. In 1993, Pavletich became an assistant member of Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center's program in cellular biochemistry and biophysics. He also holds an appointment as an assistant professor at the Cornell University Graduate School of Medical Sciences. Pavletich received the David Israel Macht Research Prize from Johns Hopkins in 1991, and is a Pew Scholar in the Biomedical Sciences.

The lecture will be held at 3:45 P.M. in Caspary Auditorium and preceded by tea at 3:15 P.M. in Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Lounge. All are welcome.

## Potpourri

**Tri-Institutional Noon Recital**  
Musicians and a dancer from the Korean Traditional Performing Arts Center, featuring Chung, Jae-Guk, National Living Treasure, will perform the classical music and dance of Korea at the Tri-Institutional Noon Recital today (Mar. 24). The Korean Traditional Performing Arts Center, one of the oldest music organizations in the world, has a historic tradition of 1500 years dating to the fifth century. The concert, to be held in Caspary Auditorium, is free. All are welcome.

### Friday film

*Quintet* (U.S.A., 1979), directed by Robert Altman, will be shown today (Mar. 24) at 8:00 P.M. in Caspary Auditorium. The film is free; all are welcome.

### Workshops

Computing Services is offering the following workshops:

Sequencing, I & II: Mon., Mar. 27 and Mon., Apr. 3, 10:00 A.M. to noon;

E-mail: Tues., Mar. 28, 2:00 to 4:00 P.M.;

WordPerfect for Windows, I & II: Thurs., Mar. 30 and Thurs., Apr. 6,

10:00 A.M. to noon. Workshops are free, but registration is required. Contact Joan Falciano, x8925, or leave voice mail at x7768.

### Clinical Research Seminar

Roy L. Silverstein, professor of medicine and chief of hematology-oncology at the Cornell University Medical Center, will discuss "Monocyte Activation by Adhesion to Endothelium" at the Clinical Research Seminar Wed., Mar. 29 at noon in Nurses Residence 110B.

### Flexible spending reminder

All 1994 Flexible Spending Account claims must be submitted

to MassMutual by Sat., Apr. 15. Contact Ginny Hansen, x8299, or Kristin Gross, x8297.

### RU coffee mugs

The Sweat Shirt Shop is selling 16-ounce insulated coffee mugs for \$5. New mugs may be filled in Tower Café for the price of a small coffee. The Shop, in RRB 133, is open Tuesdays from 11:30 A.M. to 1:30 P.M.

### Skin cancer screening

Skin cancer screenings will be held during April and May in the Outpatient Area in the RU Hospital. Registration forms, which

are available from the Employee Health Office on the first floor of the Hospital, must be returned to Box 325 by Fri., Mar. 31. Contact Candice Scheiner or Aurea Tuason, x8414, if you have any questions.

### Magazine drive

New magazine subscriptions or renewals are available through the RU Children's School at discounts up to 80 percent off the cover price. For a magazine list and order forms, contact Kathy Burke, x8580. Return completed order forms to the School by Fri., Mar. 31. A portion of the proceeds benefits the Children's School.



Performers from the Korean Traditional Performing Arts Center will present Korean classical music and dance at the Tri-Institutional Noon Recital today (Mar. 24).