



DONALD DANFORTH
PLANT SCIENCE CENTER
DISCOVERY | COMMUNITY | IMPACT

the Leaflet

VOLUME 16 | ISSUE 1 | SPRING 2014

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*The Leaflet is a publication for partners,
friends and supporters of the Donald
Danforth Plant Science Center.*

CHAIRMAN



JOHN F. MCDONNELL

NEWLY ELECTED TRUSTEES



BLACKFORD F. (BEAU) BRAUER



LEE BROUGHTON



MARK TRUDEAU

DANFORTH CENTER ELECTS NEW CHAIRMAN AND EXPANDS BOARD OF TRUSTEES

The Danforth Center Board of Trustees elected John F. McDonnell to succeed William H. Danforth, M.D., as chairman and added three St. Louis leaders as new trustees.

McDonnell has served as a Danforth Plant Science Center trustee since 2000 and as vice chairman of the board since 2007. As vice chair of the board, McDonnell, former chairman of McDonnell Douglas Corporation, had worked alongside Dr. Danforth for decades to bolster life and plant sciences in St. Louis.

McDonnell has long worked to strengthen the efforts of the Danforth Center and other organizations in St. Louis, and serves as chairman of the board of BioSTL, a group that promotes biosciences in the region.

“Soon after taking on the role of chairman, I participated in a series of in-depth sessions to learn more about the scientific research and community at the Center,” said McDonnell. “I was struck by the depth of research, the enthusiasm of the scientists, and the breadth of education and training programs. I was also struck by how nearly everything that the Danforth Center does is the result of collaboration – collaboration between Center scientists, trainees, staff, and partner organizations.”

“WE’RE THRILLED TO HAVE JOHN MCDONNELL AS OUR NEW CHAIRMAN,” SAID JAMES C. CARRINGTON, DANFORTH CENTER PRESIDENT. “HE HAS BEEN A REMARKABLE LEADER IN THE ST. LOUIS COMMUNITY, AN INVALUABLE TRUSTEE AND A GENEROUS SUPPORTER OF THE CENTER.”

Newly elected trustees are Blackford F. (Beau) Brauer, executive vice president, Hunter Engineering; Lee Broughton, head of international marketing and corporate sustainability, Enterprise Holdings; and Mark Trudeau, president and chief executive officer, Mallinckrodt Pharmaceuticals. Brauer and Broughton have served as members of the Danforth Leadership Council at the Center since 2009.

Dr. Danforth, who remains a trustee, is now founding chairman after serving as chairman since the Danforth Plant Science Center’s inception in 1998. He is widely recognized for leading the effort to strengthen and grow the region’s plant and life sciences economy and is chancellor emeritus of Washington University and chairman of the BioSTL Coalition.

USING SCIENCE TO IMPROVE THE PERFORMANCE IN FARMER'S FIELDS AND ON THE BASEBALL FIELD



New technologies are revolutionizing our ability to digitize and understand the world around us. Interpreting imaging and understanding large amounts of data are impacting many industries. These technologies have been tapped by baseball teams to improve a player's batting and pitching and by scientists to accelerate the pace of discovery. For example, cutting-edge tools can tell us how much spin is on the ball as it leaves a pitcher's hand or how a plant adapts to drought conditions.

Chris Correa, director, baseball development, St. Louis Cardinals, and Ivan Baxter, Ph.D., USDA-ARS research scientist and principal investigator, Danforth Plant Science Center, shared insights at the November "Conversations" program about how turning quantifiable information into actionable knowledge is transforming the world of sports and the world of science. Danforth Center researchers are using cutting-edge imaging technology to accelerate discovery at the Center's new Phenotyping Facility made possible by a generous gift from the Bellwether Foundation.

DATE: 11.14.13

SPEAKERS: Chris Correa, Director, Baseball Development, St. Louis Cardinals and Ivan Baxter, Ph.D., USDA-ARS Research Scientist, and Principal Investigator, Danforth Plant Science Center.

View the "Conversations" program at www.HEC-TV.org.

The "Conversations" series is organized by members of the Danforth Center Friends Committee and offers individuals the opportunity to learn about the work of the Danforth Center and the partners who help to sustain it. Discussions are focused on topics of both regional and global urgency and feature leading experts in plant science and related disciplines. The program is held quarterly and is free and open to the public. The Friends Committee and the Donald Danforth Plant Science Center are grateful for their ongoing support of the Boeing Company and to HEC-TV for its broadcasts of the program.



Upcoming —————

CONVERSATIONS

NATURE'S MEDICINES: TRANSLATING PLANTS TO HEALTHCARE APPLICATIONS

Please join **Mark Trudeau**, President and Chief Executive Officer, Mallinckrodt Pharmaceuticals and **Toni Kutchan**, Ph. D., Oliver M. Langenberg Distinguished Investigator, Vice President for Research, Donald Danforth Plant Science Center, as they discuss medicines from plants and how research at the Danforth Center reaches the marketplace.

THURSDAY, APRIL 3, 2014

5:15 P.M. RECEPTION

6:00 P.M. PRESENTATION

Reservations for Conversations are required but complimentary. We encourage Danforth Center friends to bring others.

RSVP on our website:
www.danforthcenter.org/events
or via phone: 314.582.1070



DMITRI NUSINOW, PH.D.



ASK A PLANT SCIENTIST: DMITRI NUSINOW, PH.D.

Dmitri Nusinow, Ph.D. joined the Danforth Center in 2012 as an assistant member and principal investigator. His research is focused on understanding how the circadian clock is integrated with environmental signals to control growth, physiology and development. This knowledge can be used to improve the productivity of crops.

Q: *In a nutshell, how do you describe your research?*

A: Circadian is Latin for “about-a-day”. Organisms have a 24-hour clock, known as the circadian clock that allows them to anticipate and react to the sunrise, sunset and the changing day length of the seasons. This internal mechanism assists plants during the day when they capture light energy through photosynthesis and at night to convert captured carbon into biomass. My lab is interested in understanding at a very deep level how the clock regulates these processes and which processes within plants are directly related and which are indirectly related to the circadian clock.

Q: *Why is understanding the circadian clock and evening complex in plants imperative to efforts to improve crops?*

A: It has been scientifically recognized that the circadian clock regulates a number of processes inside the plant, including photosynthesis, growth, and reproduction, as well as how plants respond to drought and changing temperatures. Understanding how the clock functions to regulate these processes will provide information that can then be used to improve their growth and ability to deal with a variety of environmental factors.

A specific example is our work to interpret how a plant’s clock regulates flowering. In the case of developing crops for biofuels, that knowledge might be very useful because if flowering could be delayed, it would allow the plant to continue to grow and increase its biomass for harvesting later in the season.

The insight that we’re gaining will allow us to better alter the clock which will, in turn, allow us to more accurately affect processes of interest without interfering with other important plant processes.

Q: *Are there any new or exciting technologies used to conduct this research?*

A: Quantitative mass spectrometry is extremely important to this work; it allows us to identify proteins and measure the exact composition of these complexes. These technologies allow us to go from being able to identify a single complex to being able to understand how the complex changes and matures over the course of the day or lifetime of the organism.

The Center’s Proteomics and Mass Spectrometry Facility gives us the ability to interrogate the function of many genes and by combining mass spectrometry with genetics, we’ve been able to really understand how proteins are formed into complexes and how those complexes interact to regulate specific pathways such as growth.

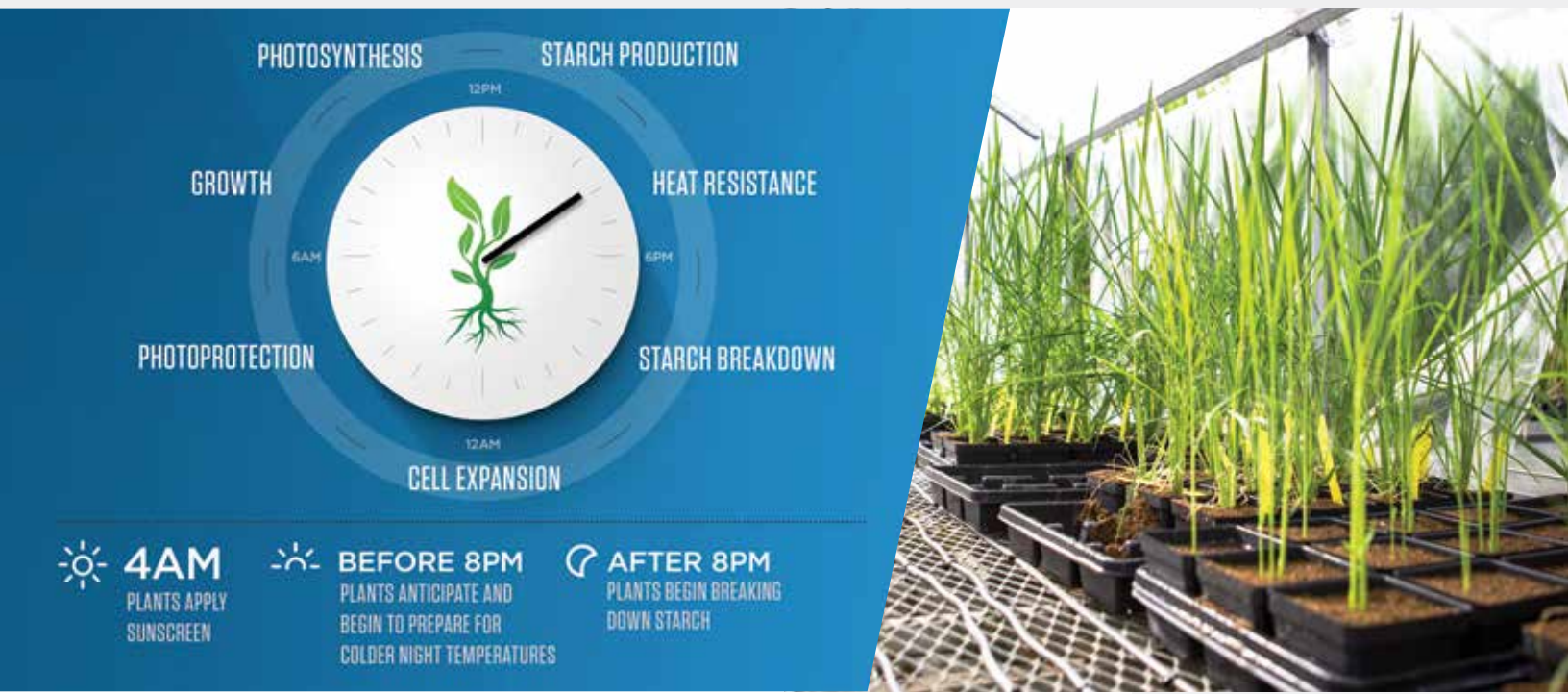
Q: *What inspired you or guided you into the field of science?*

A: I became interested in plant science after viewing a time-lapsed movie from Indiana University created by Professor Roger Hangarter. Roger was able to capture a juvenile sunflower plant tracking the sun during the day and then prior to the sun rising the next morning, the sunflower repositioned itself towards the east, in anticipation of the sun rising.

For me, the movie demonstrated how dynamic plants are and how they have very complicated responses to the environment. Plants have this incredible ability to anticipate changes in the environment, such as sunrise and sunset, without having a brain or neural network governing these complex reactions. As a biochemist, it suggested to me that plants were a good system for understanding the mechanistic bases of very complex responses.

> The Circadian Clock's Impact on Plant Growth and Development

Researchers at the Danforth Center are exploring how the circadian clock is integrated with environmental signals to control plant growth, physiology and development. This knowledge can be used to improve crops used for food, feed and fuel.



Q: *What is your impression of St. Louis and the Danforth Center since moving here in 2012?*

A: The Danforth Center is unlike any other institution that I've ever seen and is an amazing place to work. The facilities, the faculty and the resources here accelerate the potential for translating research into products that can have real world impact. My wife and I have a daughter and St. Louis has a lot to offer our family. We enjoy visiting the unique City Museum and attending cultural festivals and events. We've come to enjoy the variety of seasons and we try to take advantage of all that St. Louis has to offer.

Q: *Since coming here in 2012, how has your lab grown?*

A: My first laboratory has grown in such a short period of time. Currently, the team includes one postdoc, one staff research scientist technician and one undergraduate lab assistant. We've also trained one undergraduate intern and two high school students from the St. Louis area through our Research Experiences for Undergraduates (REU) summer internship program, the STARS program and the Center's education outreach program.

Q: *Are there any committees or groups that you're involved with at the Center?*

A: I currently have the pleasure to be the faculty liaison for the Center's Committee for Scientific Training and Mentoring (CSTM) and I am on the scientific retreat committee. I also have an adjunct position at Washington University.

Q: *In your eyes, how has plant science evolved in the past 5 years?*

A: Plant science is taking advantage of all of the tools in next generation sequencing and the collection of large data sets from model organisms to major crops. Sequencing technology has become essential and an impactful resource to plant science and has allowed plant scientists to investigate processes that might be very unique to that individual plant that we were unable to investigate previously.

WHY STUDY ARABIDOPSIS?

ARABIDOPSIS IS USED AS A MODEL SYSTEM FOR RESEARCH BECAUSE IT IS THE MOST WELL-STUDIED, HAS THE GREATEST NUMBER OF TOOLS FOR BASIC SCIENCE RESEARCH AND IT HAS BEEN A REFERENCE ORGANISM FOR MANY OF THE OTHER AGRICULTURAL SPECIES. THE INFORMATION GAINED FROM STUDYING ARABIDOPSIS TRANSLATES INTO A VARIETY OF CROPS USED FOR FOOD AND FUEL.

4

NEW LEAD SCIENTISTS
WILL HELP EXPAND THE
CENTER'S RESEARCH IN

PLANT PHENOMICS

GENOMICS

ROOT STRUCTURE

PATHOGENS

BIOENERGY GRASSES

GROWING EXPERTISE WITH FOUR NEW LEAD RESEARCHERS

Danforth Center scientists are in daily pursuit of sustainable solutions to the most critical challenges of our time. Using cutting-edge science and technology, our research aims to unleash the full potential of plants as solutions to hunger and malnutrition, renewable energy, and sustainable development of economies.

Four new lead scientists joined the Danforth Center faculty and will help expand the Center's research in plant phenomics, genomics, root structure, pathogens and bioenergy grasses. Each principal investigator will recruit an additional 10–12 scientific personnel to their labs.

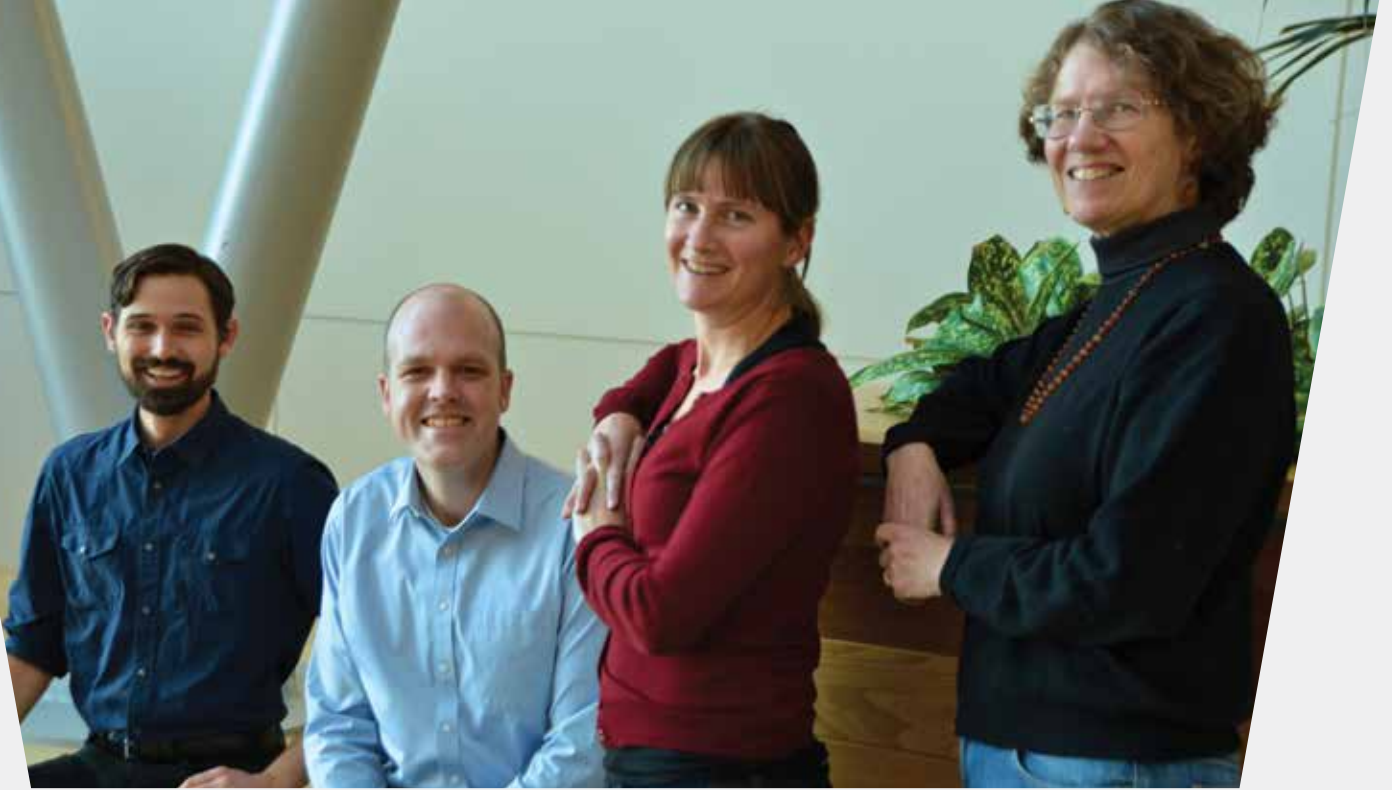
Collectively the researchers bolster core areas of focus while expanding the Center's scientific portfolio. "We are excited about the research areas that will be explored by the new investigators," said Jim Carrington, Ph.D., president of the Center. "The groups will strengthen our efforts to use genomics, imaging, and analytical technologies to accelerate discovery and contribute to achieving food and energy security."

The Center tends to look at new hires with entrepreneurial goals and research that aligns with current and future technology investment; the Center's tools are only as good as the minds guiding them. Recently the Center added the Bellwether Foundation Phenotyping Facility, new greenhouse range and plans to break ground on a \$45 million expansion this spring. The new facilities will allow the Center to continue to attract the best scientific teams to the region.

Discovery and innovation thrive in an environment that is nurturing, dynamic and inclusive. Our scientists are part of a community of individuals and organizations—in St. Louis, the region and around the world—with a shared commitment to use scientific expertise and technology to solve the most critical problems facing humanity.

These solutions have the potential to lift families, communities and nations from poverty, creating global economic growth and security for future generations.

The continued generosity of our donors enables us to attract top scientists and provide them with the necessary tools to establish their labs and research programs. Donor support helps make the Danforth Center competitive when recruiting the best and brightest scientists and gives us an edge to do the most impactful research. Thank you to all of our friends and supporters for contributing to the Danforth Center's success.



CHRIS TOPP, PH.D., DAN CHITWOOD, PH.D., REBECCA (BECKY) BART, PH.D., ELIZABETH (TOBY) KELLOGG, PH.D.

MEET THE NEW PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATORS

Elizabeth (Toby) Kellogg, Ph.D., studies cereal crops and the evolution, domestication and genetic architecture of their wild relatives in the grass family. Her research has led to identification of genes that contribute to the diversity of the primary cereal crops used for food. “Having moved to St. Louis in 1998, I’ve watched the growth and development of the Danforth Center since the beginning; I am excited to join the Center and to work with an incredible group of people,” Kellogg said. “My work on development and genomics of cereal grasses contributes directly to the Center’s focus on translating basic research into results that provide food and fuel for the U.S. and the world.”

Rebecca (Becky) Bart, Ph.D., will broaden the Center’s resources in cassava research. Her background in diseases of plants and defense mechanisms complements the Center’s research of this important crop. Cassava is a vital staple food for millions of people in sub-Saharan Africa, including Kenya and Uganda. Food security is threatened, however, by cassava diseases that cause significant losses each year for smallholder farmers and their families.

“Whereas many researchers turn to model organisms to study fundamental processes, I prefer to work directly within the system that I am trying to improve,” said Bart. “Few places in the world have the resources and infrastructure to support this type of science. The Danforth Center does and is particularly well suited to support my research on cassava. I am particularly pleased to join the Center because of the collaborative, energetic spirit that influences this community.”

In addition, **Chris Topp, Ph.D.**, and **Dan Chitwood, Ph.D.**, are helping the Center explore new areas of plant science. Chris’ research focuses on root growth and physiology while Dan’s research analyzes shoot architecture.

“The Danforth Center is unique because of its focus on real-world impact. The Center’s culture will allow me to translate scientific discoveries into tangible improvements in crop yield and sustainability,” said Topp. “The St. Louis community has a rare enthusiasm for plant science. I can’t imagine another place that would be more supportive of my research goals, and I greatly anticipate future collaborations and synergies with my new colleagues.”

Chris and Dan’s collaborations will implement new technologies, including phenotyping, automation and bioinformatics to interpret large amounts of data.

Chitwood said, “I am excited to be working with both new and established scientists with diverse and creative research interests. The Danforth Center is using technologies that are transforming the way that plant science is done, and I am looking forward to collaborations with my colleagues that will revolutionize the way we quantify plant traits and think about plant growth and development.”



ACQUISITION CREATES OPPORTUNITIES FOR INVESTORS AND BRINGING NEW PRODUCTS TO MARKET

NewLeaf Symbiotics Inc., an agricultural biotech company, acquired Intuitive Genomics Inc., a leader in the design and implementation of custom bioinformatics solutions.

NewLeaf Symbiotics is researching and commercializing naturally beneficial plant bacteria for crop health and protection. The use of natural biologicals to control plant disease and increase crop yield is one of the most promising opportunities to address the rapidly expanding global agricultural productivity gap.

“THIS IS EXACTLY THE SORT OF COLLABORATION THE DANFORTH PLANT SCIENCE CENTER SEEKS TO FOSTER. HERE YOU HAVE TWO LOCALLY INCUBATED COMPANIES, EACH OF WHICH IS A LEADER IN ITS FIELD, WORKING IN CLOSE PROXIMITY AND RECOGNIZING THE VALUE IN JOINING FORCES,”

- JIM CARRINGTON, PH.D., *President of Danforth Center*

Both companies are located at the BioResearch and Development Growth (BRDG) Park at the Donald Danforth Plant Science Center in St. Louis, Missouri. Intuitive Genomics co-founders, James C. Carrington, Ph.D., president of the Danforth Center, joined the NewLeaf Science Advisory Board; Todd Mockler, Ph.D., associate member and Geraldine and Robert Virgil Distinguished Investigator at the Danforth Center is serving as NewLeaf’s vice-president of genomics; and Doug Bryant, Ph.D., director, Bioinformatics Core at the Danforth Center joined NewLeaf as vice-president of bioinformatics.



MOGENE GREEN CHEMICALS AWARDED \$1.5 MILLION FROM THE DOE TO DEVELOP ENERGY-DENSE TRANSPORTATION FUEL FROM NATURAL GAS

MOgene Green Chemicals LLC (MGC), a wholly owned subsidiary of MOgene, LC, received a two-year, \$1.5 million grant from the U.S. Department of Energy’s Advanced Research Project Agency – Energy (ARPA-E) to develop a technology that will convert natural gas into energy-dense transportation fuel at a more affordable cost.



“Our technology will capture the ever expanding pool of natural gas resources within and outside of North America and transform them into transportation fuel,” said Dr. Abhay Singh, who is leading the MGC and is serving as the principal investigator of the project. “There is also an opportunity to capture stranded gas or bionatural gas and transform them to higher density and infrastructure compatible fuels and chemicals. Cost and yield are major barriers in transformation of natural gas and our approach provides the opportunity to do both issues.”

The key to MGC technology is the use of a photosynthetic bacterium which is known to utilize sunlight for its entire energy requirement, including fixation of CO². By combining energy from sunlight, MGC technology will convert natural gas into fuel and minimize emission of greenhouse gases. Most methylotrophic organisms typically generate metabolic energy using natural gas as the substrate and if sunlight can be used as the source of this energy, it will increase efficiency and reduce equipment costs associated with the bio-based production of fuel from natural gas. When the technology is completely developed, it will be a single step conversion of natural gas into fuel.



“WE ARE EXCITED TO RECEIVE THIS GRANT TO TEST OUR CONCEPT TO DEVELOP A PROCESS FOR CHEAPER AND CLEANER FUEL,” SAID SHAUKAT RANGWALA, SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT OF MOGENE LC. “IT ALLOWS US TO EXPAND, ADD MORE JOBS AND FURTHER PROMOTE ST. LOUIS’ EFFORTS TO BE A HUB FOR PLANT AND LIFE SCIENCE INNOVATION.”

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Many thanks to the following donors who have provided critical endowment, annual fund and other support for the Donald Danforth Plant Science Center in 2013. Through the ongoing support, loyalty, interest and generosity of many, the Danforth Center can live up to its commitment to excellence now and in the future. The names of Charter Members of our donor programs are indicated with an asterisk. This list represents gifts received January 1, 2013 - December 31, 2013.

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Thursday, April 3 - Conversations / 5:15 PM

Tuesday, May 6 - *Young Friends*, Taste of Science / 5:30 PM

Thursday, May 22 - Conversations / 5:15 PM

Saturday, October 25 - Plantasia Gala



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