

THE HUB

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Boyce Thompson Institute for Plant Research

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From the Hot Seat *by David Stern*

Do You Like My New Suits?

The end of the year is a traditional time for retrospective and anticipation. Here are some thoughts on 2004, and what's to come next year.

Reflections: Although I've been at BTI for 16 years, everything seemed to change this year. Having a perspective from the "Hot Seat" means gaining a broader view of our staff and activities, and getting an opportunity to facilitate changes and launch new initiatives. As I've said before, one of my most vivid impressions has been the strength of the BTI family, and how willing the full spectrum of staff have been to share their ideas. I've also been impressed by the social life at the Institute. Scarcely a week seems to go by without an event, and although I haven't yet had a chance to submit my pie or chili to the BTI Taster's Guild, I plan to do so next year. This year a very active Post-Graduate Society also brought several events to the Institute, and their vision seems only to have expanded for 2005. The review of Information Technologies has been an emotional process, as we try to take full advantage of the information age without losing the special character of BTI. Sometimes history weighs heavily on our decisions, as it should, but we also must feel free to look ahead without undue constraint. Finally, I want to express a special appreciation to the other members of the Management Team – and to Donna Meyer and Mary Westlake – who have made the transition to the presidency not only possible, but also fluid and positive. A special thank-you to Gary Blissard, who has assumed the challenges of the VPR position.

A look ahead: I continue to feel immensely optimistic and excited about the future of BTI. Still, we are fairly small and must choose our goals carefully if we are to accomplish them fully. Here is what I see as some of our bigger projects for 2005:

- Faculty hiring and expansion of some of our newer labs. I hope that with the leadership of Maria Harrison's search committee, we will welcome at least one new faculty member in 2005.
- Reconfiguration of the 2nd floor library/conference area. The plan for this area is still an open book, subject to a clear-eyed look at our needs and the associated costs of whatever plan is chosen. The auditorium upgrade (audio and seating area) should be completed early in 2005.
- Installation of new greenhouse controls is likely as part of an ongoing energy use reduction program. We may also get a new roof for BTI if the state budget is to be believed.
- Cooperation with USDA will continue, possibly involving temporary housing of a new USDA hire at BTI.
- We are considering a major new initiative to house state-of-the-art imaging equipment at BTI. While in the very early stages, the Board has been very supportive. We are tentatively planning an "Imaging Mini-symposium" for next spring.

These are only the tip of the iceberg. The new website, our enhanced presence on NPR, key research findings, and relationships with our partners are other examples of transformations to look for in 2005.

Thanks again for all your support, and I look forward to continuing the conversations and cooperation that characterized 2004.

Happy 80th
Birthday,
BTI!!!



1924-2004

BTI Post-Graduate Society News

Ah yes, as the year's events come to a close, it is good to know that it's been a good run. We had two excellent distinguished lecturers, two great internal Cornell speakers at BTI, a very successful, warm, sunny, first annual scientific retreat, and a hodge-podge of other gatherings, including the always popular BTI-Fests.

We on the committee would like to thank all of those who, in any way, helped us out this year. We hope that interactions with this group have been beneficial – both socially and professionally. That said, it is time for a few of us on the committee to say a big 'adios', and bow out of the organizing phase of this group. While some of the committee members will stay on, this opens up a natural rotation for new people, new involvement and fresh ideas.

SO, if YOU have a desire to help organize/host speakers, get involved in the retreat or career development issues, flex your writing skills with the PGS updates in *The Hub*, or have any other ideas that we should be thinking about, this is your committee. Truly, this committee is for the benefit of the PGS at large, which includes all post-docs and graduate students here at BTI.

Let any of us (Nicole P., Melanie, Kerry, Sarah C., Moira, Peter M. or myself) know if you have any suggestions and/or want to help out more next year.

Up2D8!! Notes from Management...

The end of the year always brings a flurry of activity – wrapping up old projects, planning new ones. This year was no exception. We focused a lot of energy around the 2005 budget – working on the zero-based budgeting concept, understanding the implications of an e-based information retrieval system (vs. our current library system), prioritizing energy conservation projects, etc. John and Joanne met with PI's and supervisors to discuss their 2005 budgets; revisions are in process.

In the HR arena, we communicated a change in leave plans to staff, giving staff the opportunity to switch to the new PTO plan in January or stay with the existing plan. In addition, we have started the annual review process for technicians and support staff. We hope to have all evaluations complete by the end of the year, with meetings scheduled with employees in early January.

The BTI compensation plan was reviewed and we will be making some adjustments in 2005. Pay Band minimums will increase 2%, keeping pace with Cornell and the rest of the market. In addition, we will be raising the starting pay levels for Research Assistants and Postdoctoral Associates in 2005 and 2006. Any impacted staff will be notified as part of their evaluation process.

Parking Perils

As of January 1, 2005, the fine for parking in a reserved space on campus will be \$50; any vehicle parked for extended periods in a short-term, time-limited area may be issued multiple tickets, and may be towed upon issuance of the fourth consecutive ticket. Also, the late fee for parking tickets will increase to \$10. For more info, visit www.parking.cornell.edu

Congratulations!

Georg Jander has been awarded a \$900,000 USDA grant for "Microarray analysis of agriculturally relevant gene expression in the peach-potato aphid, *Myzus persicae*". Georg is the PI on this grant and the co-PIs are Nancy Moran (U. of Arizona) and Stewart Gray (Cornell). The goals are to sequence aphid cDNAs, construct a microarray, and measure gene expression related to aphid ecology (Nancy Moran), virus transmission (Stewart Gray), and plant-insect interactions (Georg). We look forward to learning more about aphid biology.

In addition, Georg has received funding from NSF International Programs (\$10,800) for collaborations with the lab of Jonathan Gershenzon at the Max Planck Institute for Chemical Ecology in Jena, Germany. The funds will be used for travel related to a project on glucosinolate breakdown products and aphid defense in *Arabidopsis*.

Trips & Travels

In November, **Leonard Weinstein** was in Iceland again to do a quality assurance audit of an analytical laboratory in Reykjavik.

A reminder to foreign staff and visitors: If you are planning to travel outside the US, want to file for an extension, change status, etc., it is YOUR RESPONSIBILITY to prepare far in advance for any paperwork or materials you need from BTI. If you have any questions, please see Lucy or Valleri.

November/December Service Anniversaries

Larry Willard	22 yrs
Elaine Van Etten	7 yrs
Joyce Van Eck	7 yrs
Tom Brutnell	5 yrs
Nicole Pence	3 yrs
Christine Fleet	3 yrs
Bruno Donzelli	3 yrs
Judy Kolkman	2 yrs
Katia Wostrikoff	2 yrs
Kerry Curtiss	2 yrs
Katia Anufrikova	2 yrs
Jianping Yang	2 yrs
Gyu In Lee	1 yr
Jocelyn Handley	1 yr

Health & Wellness at BTI

The BTI Wellness Fair, associated with open enrollment on November 17th, was a great success!



Over 30 employees participated, getting their blood pressure and glucose levels taken, and measuring body fat.



Congratulations to **Ignacio Maldonado-Mendoza** (pictured below). He was the lucky winner of the goody-filled basket from Excellus Blue Cross Blue Shield!



Excellus Member Rewards

Excellus Blue Cross Blue Shield offers a number of “member rewards” to health insurance participants. Here are a few that may interest you:

Massage Therapy – Discounts offered at Gentle Hands Massage Therapy in Ithaca and Alicia Hirschorn, LMT in Lansing. Show your member ID card to get discounts.

Acupuncture Therapy – Discounts available at Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine in Ithaca. Show your member ID card.

Empire Vision Centers – In Auburn, Binghamton, Cortland, Elmira, Ithaca and Corning. Receive a 20% discount on contact lenses and 25% discount on eye glasses.

For these and more member rewards visit Excellus online at:
www.excellusbcs.com

Safety Committee Note

Waterless hand sanitizers have been installed throughout the building in an effort to curtail the exchange of undesirable microbes! These units are generally located near the safety showers at the west end of each floor. Units will also be installed near the 2nd floor kitchen and near the vending area in the basement.

Keeping the hands clean is a proven way to help stem the spread of infectious pathogens. Do yourself a favour in this season of limited flu vaccines and use the sanitizers early and often - kind of like voting! If you have a suggestion for the location of additional units please inform Larry Russell.

Step Up!

Q: What is the most famous New Year’s resolution of all time?

A: This year, I’m going to start exercising!

Well, BTI has just the thing to help get you started, stay motivated, and keep going! Excellus BCBS has designed an event called the “Step Up Healthy Competition”. It is based on two goals - being more physically active and eating more fruits and vegetables. Participants form teams, keeping track of physical activity and nutrition progress, which is then recorded on a website so you can see where everyone ranks in the competition. You will also get a balance book to record your personal progress, a pedometer, the chance to win cool prizes by meeting various goals throughout the competition. Look for more details on this event in January 2005.

If anyone is interested in helping me plan and organize this event, email me (VLL2) or stop by my office.
- **Valleri**

Top 10 Energy Reduction Tips

The following is an excerpt from an article published by the Energy Reduction Division of the Cornell Utilities Department. Improvements to facility design, including the computerized control of lab buildings, have lead to very substantial energy savings. However, many of these energy saving improvements are only fully effective if the people working in the labs—the end users—are involved in the energy conservation efforts. There are many things that you can do as both a laboratorian and energy consumer to reduce the overall consumption of energy in your lab:

- * Turn off the lights when you leave for a meeting or for the day. Especially if your lights do not turn off themselves after a few minutes.
- * Turn off all electrical equipment, when possible, when you leave for the day.
- * Use timers to turn other pieces of equipment on and off.
- * Turn off your computer's monitor when not in use. The monitor consumes over half of the energy used by the average computer. Even if you can't turn it off, set your computer's energy savings features to put your computer and monitor "to sleep" after 10 minutes which cuts power use nearly to zero.
- * Close the sash on your fume hood, especially if you have a VAV type fume hood. A typical five foot hood uses \$3500 per year in heating/cooling, closing a VAV hood sash can cut the air volume and cost by two thirds!
- * Promptly report room comfort conditions that are not normal. Rooms that are too hot or too cool may be due to faulty thermostats or other controls that are malfunctioning or have drifted from set-points resulting in wasted energy as well as uncomfortable conditions for you.
- * Report drips of water from sink taps, chilled water connections or RO faucets.
- * Buy energy efficient equipment. Look for the Energy Star logo or other statements that an electrical device is designed to be energy efficient. Each 1000 watts costs \$700 per year in electricity. If the extra cost of a "high efficiency" unit can be paid for in 5-7 years or less, that is what you should choose.
- * When purchasing natural gas powered or consuming devices buy equipment that uses an electronic ignition instead of a pilot light. Pilot lights waste over 20 percent of the gas used in the United States.
- * Use shades and blinds to help keep your space cool on sunny days. The shade can reduce your cooling load in south or west facing rooms by over 30%.

Better Start Balancing the Checkbook!

By Chuck Jaffe, CBS MarketWatch - Submitted by Nancy Ray

Most Americans are as likely to try balancing on a high wire as they are balancing their checkbook. One of the financial world's most basic chores is overlooked with alarming regularity, as consumers use the nearest ATM as a substitute for breaking out the pencil and charting their deposits and outflows to the penny.

But new laws designed to improve the banking business should make consumers want to pay more attention to their bank statements, not so much because there might be problems but because anyone with a banking account will be affected by the rules changes.

The Check Clearing Act for the 21st Century or "Check 21", took effect in October and was designed to make the check-payment system more efficient, but like every other upgrade designed to help consumers and their money, it will take some getting used to.

Check 21 is designed to make it easier for banks to process checks electronically, making it so that the 40 billion paper checks written each year don't need to be moved physically from one bank to the next. When the Sept. 11 terror attacks shut down the commercial aviation system, the banking system suffered and the push came to get the new rules into place. (Severe weather, which limits flying and hampers the ability to deliver the actual checks, has long slowed the check-clearing process too.)

For consumers, Check 21 means no change on the front end of the banking process. You write your check as usual, and then the fun begins. Typically, when you write a check today, the actual check must be sent back to your bank for the money to be withdrawn from your account.

Banks can dance around that paper trade by agreeing to accept electronic information, but with over 20,000 financial institutions in America -- many of them tiny and not yet in the electronic age -- the old ways are not exactly disappearing.

Under Check 21, if a bank, savings-and-loan, credit union or other institution doesn't accept electronic check clearing, the bank that receives a check will simply make an image of the check, send it to a processing facility near the bank that refuses the electronic deals and have a "substitute check" presented to complete the deal. The bank still gets its paper, but the process is faster.

But you may stop getting your paper, if you are in the 40 percent of all banking customers still getting canceled checks back.

About 40% of all bank customers get canceled checks back in their statements, but that is likely to change with Check 21. If your statement includes small reproductions of your checks - a change that many large banks have moved to in anticipation of Check 21 - they might now include reproductions of those substitute checks.

Only New York and Massachusetts have rules requiring the return of canceled checks (or substitutes after Check 21 hits town), and even those rules exempt credit unions; so while some institutions will keep offering to return canceled checks and substitutes as a customer service, you can bet the practice will die out within a decade.

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Recognition & Rewards

Stars Among Our Staff...

Comstock Laboratory Accomplishments

All: The entire lab group has pulled together to work efficiently and effectively towards project goals despite considerable turmoil and conditions that challenge morale. They have all worked, individually and as a team, to overcome these issues and make the past year highly productive.

Paul King: For his outstanding leadership role and coordination of the Outreach Program for the GWUE project. His expertise as a logistics coordinator for the lab's most recent exportation of specimens to Oklahoma is greatly appreciated.

Brian Gollands: For his creativity, attention to detail, flexibility in producing, updating, and maintaining a robust high quality website. The website has extensive materials for the public, scientific community, and collaborators of the GWUE project.

Christine Fleet: For her relentless efforts at maintaining organization of databases, sample collection and processing. In particular, she has carried out a successful collaboration with Tim Setter's lab in analyses of ABA in rice for the GWUE project.

Wendy Vonhof: For her diligence in the setting up and maintaining of our greenhouse conditions and experiments, as well as numerous long days at the helm of dueling LICOR photosynthesis systems. And for unsurpassed long distance navigation to our mid-western collaborators providing unprecedented care and comfort for many *Solanaceous* passengers, i.e., important genetic lines of tomatoes.

Roman Pausch: For providing greatly increased leadership and supervision at BTI and keeping all the balls in the air. Roman has worked diligently to bring several respective projects towards effective closure in 2005.

Kudos! Kudos! Kudos!

Jude Tulla deserves a hearty Kudos for keeping CIT on their toes and saving BTI a little money. When CIT activated a jack on the wrong network, they wanted to charge BTI \$45 to fix the problem as they were absolutely certain they only followed our orders. Jude, being very organized, had all the paperwork to prove their mistake and not only did she get the jack switched for free, she convinced them to give us a credit for prior "service", which is unheard of with CIT! Thanks, Jude!

- Joan Curtiss

Two graduate students in the Brutnell lab have recently passed through one of the "flaming hoops" of graduate school--**Ling Bai** and **Liza Conrad** have both passed their "A" exams and are now official Cornell Ph.D. candidates. Kudos to both of these deserving young scientists--congratulations on your successes and good luck on your research projects.

- Denise Costich

I would like to give Kudos to **Bridget Randall** for cleaning out the Martin lab -80 so that we could transfer some of our stuff into it while ours is being repaired. Thanks!

- Linda Rymarquis

BIG PHAT KUDOS going out to **Liz Estabrook** for helping out in the organization of the Distinguished Lecturer events, and for the much appreciated assistance in the BTI-Fest celebrations!

- Judy Kolkman

Merry Kudos to **Brian Gollands** for all of his A/V support and efforts before, during and after the BTI Holiday Party.

- Valleri

Xuemei Tang received a Performance Excellence Award in November for her excellent work on the TOMET database. Congratulations, Xuemei!

Balancing the Checkbook

...Continued from Page 4

Somewhere in the process, the original check is likely to be destroyed after 30 or 60 days. (Many checks already are incinerated or shredded in this fashion, but there is no change in the rules that financial institutions must keep a clear representation of your check for seven years.)

One plus here is that the imaging systems that banks are adding may allow you to view your check reproductions online, and print out copies if you need them for your records. While copies that you print are not, technically speaking, substitute checks, most courts and tax officials now accept them, a practice that is likely to spread. The other big changes should come in processing your bank drafts and protecting yourself from fraud, forgery and identity theft.

A big part of the idea behind Check 21 is to speed up the float, the amount of time it takes to clear a check once it enters the banking system. Consumers who "play the float," typically are writing checks today -- usually based on money that is just coming into their own account -- hoping that the recipient doesn't cash the check immediately.

Check 21 will speed up processing time, making the tactic that much more dangerous and increasing the likelihood that someone who plays the float will wind up writing rubber checks.

**If you write a check to buy
groceries in the morning,
there's a good chance it will hit
your bank by lunch.**

In short, the float is sunk.

On the fraud front, Check 21 is a step up in consumer protection, because it changes current laws that favor the banks.

Under Check 21, a bank must prove within 10 days that it did not make an error -- like crediting a check twice - or accept a forged check. After that, the customer must be credited with the disputed amount, even if the bank's investigation is incomplete. And if the reason you couldn't prove that a check was forged is that the original has been burned or shredded, you get the money back.

Under current law, the bank doesn't have to credit the consumer's account until it completes the investigation.

Of course, the changes in the fraud protections still won't help those folks who don't at least review their statement to see what's there and if it was properly processed.

Maybe that will convince some people to balance their checkbooks just a bit more often.

And In The End... *By Vallerina*

Here I am. Mere moments away from the "end". In fact, several "ends", each of varying significance. The end of the day in the last week of work, in the end of the last month before the end of the year, working on the end of the last page of the last *Hub* of 2004. Pondering which pearls of wisdom, life lessons and/or heartfelt sentiments, selected from my vast reservoir of such things, to share with you. Alas, I have decided the reservoir is far too deep and wide to draw from in a hasty manner so instead I give you this...

BTI's "Breaking News" Headlines of 2004

(As seen, heard and poetically interpreted by the inhabitant of the General Information and Help Center, a.k.a., GIHC. Thereby making me the GIHC Chick. Here we go...)

Sequencer Down! Don't Panic, Steve Says - Just A One Time Thing!

BTI'ers Bid Farewell To Beloved, Long-Time Member:
Barbara Warland's Yellow Wall Fades Into The Sunset!

Affiliation Agreement Not Signed! BTI'ers Will Have To
Mow Own Lawn And Empty Own Recycle Bins!

MAC Becomes Inactive! If You Never Noticed They Were
Activated, Please Disregard And Return To Your Regularly
Scheduled Program!

BTI Photo Board Awash With MTV-Style Bobble Heads!
Skeptics Ask, "Too Cute For The 'Tute?"

Explosion Rocks BTI Atrium! Experts Determine Squirrel
To Blame!

Election 04: BTI'ers Revel at Sweeping Mock Election Outcome!
Results Are Obvious Prediction For Real Election!

Reception Window Returns! "Can I Get Fries With That"
Heard Over 200 Times Daily!

And the Number One BTI Headline for 2004...

BTI Presidential Search On! BTI Presidential Search Off!
BTI Presidential Search On! BTI Presidential Search...?
BTI Presidential Search...? BTI Presidential Search...? BTI
Presidential Search...? New BTI President Named!

Happy Holidays, Folks.

THE HUB

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