



# NIEHS

# ENVIRONMENTAL FACTOR

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## U.S. and Vietnamese Governments Establish Framework for Dioxin Research

### DERT Takes on the Challenges Ahead for Joint Research

There are still lots of details to work out, but United States and Vietnam officials have established a basic framework to enable them to share existing research, identify data gaps and fill those gaps through additional research.

The two governments held a joint scientific conference March 3-6 in Hanoi to exchange information and research on the health and environmental effects of Agent Orange, and particularly its contaminant, dioxin.

On March 7, a panel of international scientists identified some data gaps and identified general areas for further research in Vietnam.

The next day, senior scientists from the Vietnamese Ministry of Science, Technology and the Environment, the Vietnamese Ministry of Health, NIEHS, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention met to establish an agreement for future research based on the findings of the three-day conference and the one-day international workshop.

Dioxin contamination in Vietnam has persisted for more than 30 years, according to a memorandum of understanding signed March 10 by **Anne Sassaman**, director of NIEHS' Division of Extramural Research and Training, and Nguyen Ngoc Sinh, director of the National Environmental Agency and Ministry of Science, Technology and Environment in Vietnam. Other NIEHS staff participating in the meeting and subsequent discussion were **Chris Portier**, director of NIEHS'



Photo by Jan Sassaman

*Professor Le Ngoc Trong and Anne Sassaman, NIEHS' director of the Division of Extramural Research, at the Vietnam-U.S. Conference on Human Health and Environmental Effects of Agent Orange/Dioxin in Hanoi March 3-6.*

Environmental Toxicology Program, **Sheila Newton**, OPPE, **Walter Rogan**, senior investigator in the epidemiology branch, and **Sandy Lange**, consultant and retired NTP liaison.

"Hot spots" of dioxin contamination have been identified in Vietnam and others are presumed to exist, the document said. Dioxin has migrated through soil and has been transported by wind and erosion into water, and contaminated soil continues to

provide a reservoir of dioxin for direct and indirect exposure pathways for humans and wildlife.

Portier first began pursuing dioxin research in Vietnam more than seven years ago. At the time, as Portier and other members of the delegation discovered, the Vietnamese government prohibited the transfer of any research material across

**See Dioxin, page 3**

**What? Chippendale Dancers at NIEHS?**

**Over 18? See page 7 for details**

# New Inaugural Lecture Series Features Women, Life Balance

## Anne Sassaman Urges Community Involvement

It's a new kind of lecture series for NIEHS.

Unlike the Falk and Rodbell lecture series that focus on science, the new Spirit Lecture Series will focus on the balance between work and personal life and will feature women speakers.

NIEHS Director **Ken Olden**, in opening statements, said the idea for such a lecture series was born at a brown bag luncheon he attended with the Assembly of Women Scientists. There, they pointed out that women generally devote more time and effort to community activities than men. At NIEHS, Olden said, they do spend a great deal of time and effort serving on advisory committees and mentoring - those things that create the NIEHS community of today.

"I want us to begin to recognize this," Olden said.

The Diversity Council's Women's History Month Committee began putting the Spirit Lecture program together, and the Office of the Scientific Director co-sponsored it.

"The Spirit Lecture Series embodies the idea that balance in one's life is necessary to achieve greatness in any field, including science. Our lives are comprised of many things - science, community, volunteering and mentoring - and spirit is a component of all of these," according to a statement prepared by the Women's History Committee. The first lecture March 22 featured DERT Director **Anne Sassaman**. Each year, the lecture will coincide with Women's History Month.

Sassaman's "Life! In Science" presentation included reflections on things in life that go beyond the science: work, family, service, community and her mentors.

Sassaman grew up in mill towns along Georgia's Chattahoochee

River. Her mother was a high school English teacher and her father a textile engineer who later became a teacher. Among the events that shaped her life, Sassaman developed polio as a child. Because of that, she spent a year at an institution in Warm Springs, Ga., that she describes as a "warm, nurturing place" and that, incidentally, piqued her interest in science.

A friend of her father took her under his wing, nurturing her interest in science by showing her the ropes in the lab and helping her with experiments.

Sassaman, who has since spent a lot of time herself mentoring, recalls two teachers who had a big impact on her early academic life. One had a positive impact and the other a negative impact. One was a math teacher who thought girls couldn't do math and the other a college chemistry teacher who helped her get on track in college where she majored in chemistry. At the time, the chemistry honor society didn't even accept women. Not to be deterred, she continued pursuing her interest. She earned a doctorate and did her post doc work at Duke with an NIH training grant. After 10 years at NIH and the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute, Sassaman came



Photo by Steve McCaw, Image Associates

*Diversity Council Chair Brad Collins, left, and NIEHS Director Ken Olden present the Spirit Award to Anne Sassaman, DERT director and first ever Spirit lecturer.*

to NIEHS in 1986.

"Relatively speaking, the federal government is a good place for women to be," Sassaman said.

According to 1998 statistics, the average salary for women scientists was \$42,000, compared to \$52,000 for men. Within the federal government, 32 percent of women work in administration, 28 per-

**See Spirit, page 7**



### Factor Wants to Hear From You!

Factor welcomes submissions from all employees, so send your NIEHS-related articles, announcements, story ideas and other news to Colleen Chandler, mail drop EC-12; e-mail [chandler@niehs.nih.gov](mailto:chandler@niehs.nih.gov), or call 1-5143. The NIEHS Environmental Factor is published as a communication service to the employees of the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences in Research Triangle Park, N.C.

- Writer/Editor/Layout - Colleen Chandler
- Director of Communications - William Grigg

# Ready, Set, Collaborate



Photo by Jan Sassaman

In Vietnam, **Sandy Lange** works on the memorandum of understanding between the U.S. and Vietnamese governments while **Chris Portier** (over her left shoulder) and U.S. Embassy staff look on. Meanwhile, **Anne Sassaman**, DERT director, reviews an older version of the document. Portier, who heads the NIEHS Environmental Toxicology Program, and Lange first began pursuing a joint research agreement more than seven years ago, but had to temporarily abandon the issue while diplomats ironed out differences in policy.

## Dioxin, from page 1

borders. Members of the delegation were nearly arrested when they tried to take research reports on the plane as they left the country. All of their material was confiscated, including reprints of Portier's own paper, he said.

Portier said a crucial accomplishment of the March conference was to get published versions of Vietnamese studies for international scientists to look at and analyze.

The conference provided the first peek at how Vietnamese scientists conduct their research, how much research has been done and what the quality of the research is. Now, he said, scientists outside Vietnam can begin to find out what and how dioxin research has been done in Vietnam.

"This will stimulate possible collaboration between U.S. and Vietnamese scientists. I think we have opened the door, and that's a step forward," he said.

Sassaman agreed.

"This framework for collaboration is an important step forward," she said. "The real difficulties lie ahead; agreeing to do the research is the easy part. The more difficult task will be to develop research studies that are definitive and address the underlying causes of disease in Vietnam."

In Vietnam nearly every scientist in the country - whether at a government lab or in academia - works for the government, and all research reports are under government control, Portier said. The way the Vietnamese government selects and funds research is different from how NIH does it, he said. Details such as what constitutes peer review and what constitutes open publication policy are still being worked out.

Among the health research priorities established by the memorandum of understanding are reproductive and developmental disorders that may be occurring in the general population. These include miscar-

riage, premature birth, congenital malformation, endocrine disorders, neurological disorders, immunodeficiency, cancer, genetic damage and diabetes mellitus.

Environmental research priorities include developing more rapid and less expensive methods to screen dioxin residue levels in soil and biological samples. That will likely require upgrading lab facilities and equipment to international standards, according to the memorandum of understanding.

The document also says that the exchange of grad students and post docs, extended visits by senior scientists from both countries and implementing a seminar series and training programs are needed to foster collaborations between the two governments.

Before any additional research will be conducted, a joint advisory committee must be established to define the scope of the joint research, coordinate collaborative research and review and approve research content areas. That committee should have a support unit in each country and should meet at least once a year, the memorandum said.

It also said regulations should be established to govern the organization and implementation of the collaborative research, according to the document, and formal agreement must be worked out to establish:

- The methods used to propose, develop, evaluate and fund research;
- The eligibility criteria for scientists involved in the research;
- Scientific and ethical policies for the joint research;
- Methods and time frames to evaluate compliance with laws and regulations;
- The degree to which research findings will be made available to the international scientific community;
- The avenues through which research findings will be published and the process that must be followed for publication approval.

The memorandum said funding must cover core research, human resources and lab facilities and equipment.

Portier said the project has the potential to be very controversial since there are so many different groups of people with entrenched points of view, including U.S. war veterans who were exposed to the chemical.

# Thanks For



**Rhonda Carroll**, a support services specialist, is an exemplary employee in the Office Services Unit, Administrative Services Branch, Office of Management. She is exceedingly knowledgeable about her job which involves a wide range of often unrelated duties. She is extremely well-

organized and efficient. Rhonda provides excellent customer service and always assists floundering end users of videoconferencing equipment, the conference room scheduler, voice mail, telephone equipment, mail services, moves and transportation services, etc. She remains cheerful and upbeat despite ceaseless interruptions throughout her work day. Rhonda is a joy to know and a "supreme" assistant to me.

--**Ronda Rice**, telecomm manager

I would like to recognize the work of **Mary Alexander**, our secretary here in the Research Contracts Branch. Mary has been our secretary for many years and has always been there for all of us to do whatever needed to be done. Her knowledge and skills have



increased to the point where I don't know what we would do, or could do, without her. She has done her job so well for so long that it is difficult to imagine anyone else filling that role within our office. Like many supervisors that have great secretaries, I selfishly hope that she will never leave and that I retire before she does.

--**Allen Benton**, supervisory contracts specialist

*This year the NIEHS Diversity Co-Secretaries Day to include clerical support staff. Support staff will be honored at a ceremony on April 16 from 2 to 3 p.m. at the NIEHS Center. As part of the celebration, we invite you to nominate an employee who routinely goes above and beyond the call of duty to support their division.*

On paper, **Bonnie Allen** serves as the branch secretary for the TOB Branch. This she does extremely well, but in fact, Bonnie is the person that all the people not associated with our branch turn to when they need something done correctly. In addition to providing direction to the other support staff, she cheerfully handles Gary Boorman's secretarial needs, she arranges travel for Scott Masten, and she has arranged travel for many folks outside the Institute. Bonnie has provided guidance and secretarial support to the Laboratory of Environmental Health Sciences to fill vacancies in their secretarial staff. These are just a few examples of the things she gets whatever needs doing done for whomever asks. For these and many other reasons, Bonnie Allen is deserving of special recognition and gratitude.

--**John Bucher**, chief, TOB.

**Maria Sanders**, secretary, is a team player who eagerly steps in to help out whenever she is needed. She is ideal for her role as branch secretary because her professional demeanor, positive attitude and pleasing personality make a lasting impact upon customers, visitors and FEB staff alike. She is an organized, conscientious and dedicated employee who, when she has completed tasks, will seek out additional things to accomplish. She is a credit to the Institute and exemplifies the values espoused by the FEB.



--**Tom Bedick**, chief, FEB

# All You Do

...ouncil expanded the Professional administrative and technical honored at a recognition ceremony the Rodbell Conference supervisors were asked to goes above and beyond the . Here are the nominations...

...ology Operations person a large number of thing done quickly and ff for the branch, she ICCEC meetings for ur branch. She also pro- while they worked bles of how she works to many other reasons,



**Patricia Harris**, CTB's program support assistant, is a vital member of the CTB team, providing a wide range of support services vital to our productivity. Besides doing terrific administrative work she participates as a member of our technical team, testing and debugging software and managing CIT accounts. Patricia excels at identifying what needs attention and then works independently to get the job done. She performs all these duties with a uniformly positive attitude and a willingness to go the extra mile. In short, Patricia's contributions go a long way toward helping CTB function smoothly and efficiently.

--Nancy Stegman, chief, CTB



**Susan Fuller** provides exemplary support service as a library technician both to the scientific staff at NIEHS and to her colleagues in the Library and Information Services Branch. As document delivery coordinator, Susan is responsible for making sure Institute scientists receive copies of journal articles from the Library's collection and from libraries around the country in a

timely and cost-effective manner. Last year she handled 13,000 requests from our scientists and also 5,000 requests from other libraries for materials from our collection. At the same time, Susan has taken the initiative for ordering supplies and maintenance for library equipment, for keeping track of the Institute's manuscripts, and for keeping the library's office working smoothly. Despite a relentless workload, Susan always exhibits an extraordinarily high degree of commitment to providing quick and complete service to the Institute's scientists, and she does so with humor and a sincere care for others that make her an indispensable member of the library team.

--Dav Robertson, library director

To limit the recognition to one person is difficult because we have many people at EHP who do exemplary work. But, if I must choose, my choice would be **Tanya Tillett**. Tanya is a highly organized, energetic, resourceful, intelligent, and competent editorial



assistant who does what it takes to get her job done. She also is very selfless helping others when there is a need. Tanya is a supervisor's dream come true.

--Tom Goehl, editor-in-chief, *Environmental Health Perspectives*

# Who NIEHS Is...

## Dav Robertson Collects Books, Illustrations

He intended to be a chemist, but it apparently wasn't in the books for him. Then again, maybe it was.

Library Director **William Davenport Robertson**, better known as "Dav," is surrounded by books these days, both at home and at work.

Since he came to NIEHS as the first professional librarian in 1977, when the NIEHS book collection amounted to maybe a thousand books, the NIEHS library has grown to 25,000 books and 500 subscriptions and has gone from the bookshelves well into cyberspace. About 75 percent of the library's journals are now available on-line, and the library proudly offers its electronic resources to scientists in search of information.

But it is the real thing- the old standby hardbacks - that draw Robertson's attention. In the latter half of the 19th century, printers began printing books on acidic paper. Unless those books are kept away from light and moisture, they deteriorate. In another 50 to 100 years, the literary history of that time period will literally be in crumbles, Robertson said.

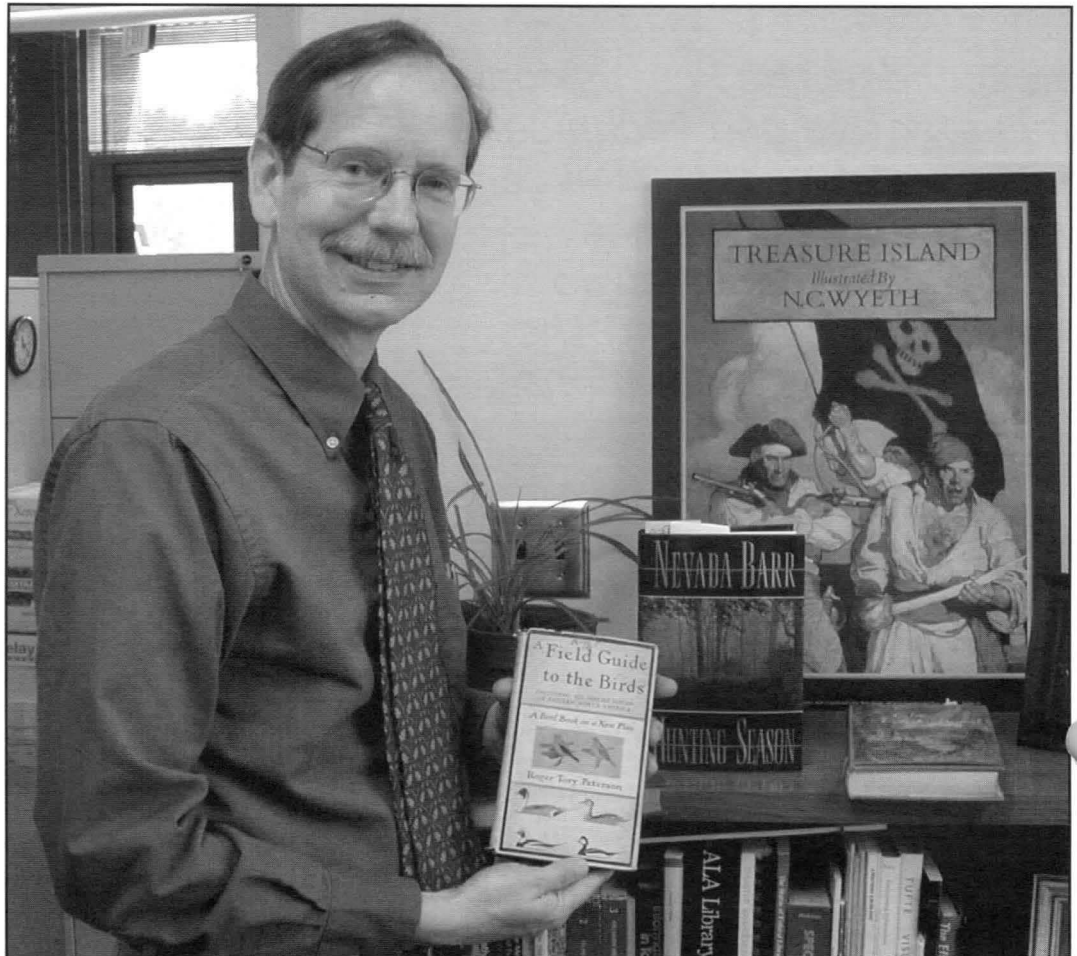
His old-book collecting days began years ago when he stumbled across an old Sax Rohmer mystery novel from the 1930s in his mother-in-law's attic. He found himself looking for - and finding - more of Rohmer's books.

He searches old book stores and other likely sources for first editions, preferably signed by the author. All total, he says he has about 150 books that are "worth something." No doubt he has plenty more with value that cannot be defined in monetary terms.

In addition to Rohmer, Robertson collects mysteries from modern mystery writer Nevada Barr and North Carolina mystery writer Margaret Maron.

A native of Hickory, N.C., Robertson also collects books on the history of western North Carolina. One of his favorites, *Happy Valley*, is a genealogy of the William Lenoir family that settled in western North Carolina before the American Revolution. Lenoir was Robertson's great great great grandfather. Robertson is named after William Davenport Robertson, who married Lenoir's daughter and built Walnut Fountain, a historic home that still stands today near Lenoir, the town named for the family.

Other Robertson favorites are in the *Rivers of America* series that also began in the 1930s. Books in that series provide historical accounts of riverside communities, and give a lot of information on the natural history, human settlement and geology, he said.



Library Director **Dav Robertson** collects old books and illustration such as the artwork by N.C. Wyeth that became the cover of *Treasure Island*. His collection includes children's books, nature handbooks for kids and young adults, mysteries, and books on natural history and western North Carolina history.

Robertson has always had somewhat of a hankering for history. After he discovered in college that lab work was not for him, he became a history major at the University of North Carolina - Chapel Hill, specializing in East Asian history.

He thought he had found his calling, and he joined the Peace Corp. He spent two years in Korea, teaching English at a university and developed a bond with the people there. He said he realized that he was not interested in studying these people, but he maintains a cultural interest in the art and history of the region.

He returned to the United States and to Carolina to study library science. In February, he was elected to the position of chapter cabinet chair-elect for the Special Libraries Association, an international association of libraries from 60 countries. The first year of the two-year term, Robertson will learn the duties of the chair and will assume the chair's duties the second year. Robertson has been a member of the SLA since shortly after coming to NIEHS. The SLA, the principle organization for technical libraries including corporate, newspaper, science, special collections and art.



Photo by Steve McCaw, Image Associates

## Chippendales? Naw, guess again...

Actually, it's four of the Institute's elite runners caught in the old D-E module shower room just before it was shut down for renovations. Originally just a tiled room with a shower stall, it gradually accumulated high school style lockers, a mirror, a bench, and even a fan. At peak use in the spring and fall, the shower queue would stretch to seven men, with all lockers occupied. These brave souls, from left to right, **Charles Alden, Walter Rogan, James Huff** and **Chris Schonwalder**, braved not only the camera, but years of unreliably hot and cold water and inside door knobs that fell off. The new men's locker room will be located nearby, where bathrooms used to be. The women's locker room replaces the old men's and women's locker rooms, said Carol Bennett, project officer. The renovations are expected to be complete by mid-April.

## Earth Day Activities Planned for April 25

Tightened national security means that unlike previous years in which the public was invited to attend NIEHS Earth Day activities, there will not be any members of the public at this year's activities planned for April 25.

Rather, organizers say, the activities will be designed for Institute employees and will include a wider variety of hands-on activities.

Earth Day 2002 will kick off with a presentation from CSP Harry LeBlanc, who will talk about organic gardening, followed by a representative from the Triangle Transit Authority, who will address alternative means of transportation.

From 11 a.m. until 1 p.m. and weather permitting, display tables will be set up on the lakeside patio. If the weather is not conducive to outdoor activities, the event will be moved inside to the mall area. Displays and activities will include the annual plant exchange, vermicomposting and seed planting, organic gardening, the NIEHS' master landscape plan, recycling, alternative transportation, safety, blue bird houses, and the adopt-a-highway program.

### *Spirit, from page 2*

cent in technical positions, 21 percent in clerical, 15 percent in professional position, 3 percent in blue collar jobs, with the remaining 1 percent in miscellaneous jobs.

Women, she said, have six unique attributes of leadership: they empower others, they are good at restructuring, they are natural teachers, they are good role models, they have an air of openness and they are questioners.

"Women prefer being in the center, not at the top. The top is lonely," she said.

She encourages people to get involved in Institute activities such as the highway cleanup, the annual holiday celebration, blood drives, recycling, mentoring and serving on committees.

### Up and Coming

- The NIEHS Work and Family Life Center will host "Writing an Effective Resume" on **April 16** from 9 a.m. until 11 a.m. in the Rodbell Auditorium.
- Take Your Child to Work Day will be **April 25** at NIEHS. For more information, contact Marcia Soward at 541-0395.
- Effective Meetings will be presented by Encore Communications on **April 30**. The presentation will focus on evaluating meeting objectives, creating an agenda and assigning meeting roles. The course requires a training nomination by April 16. For more information, contact Bonnie Parker at 541-3315.

*The deadline for submitting items for Up and Coming is the 15th of the month before the activity or event.*

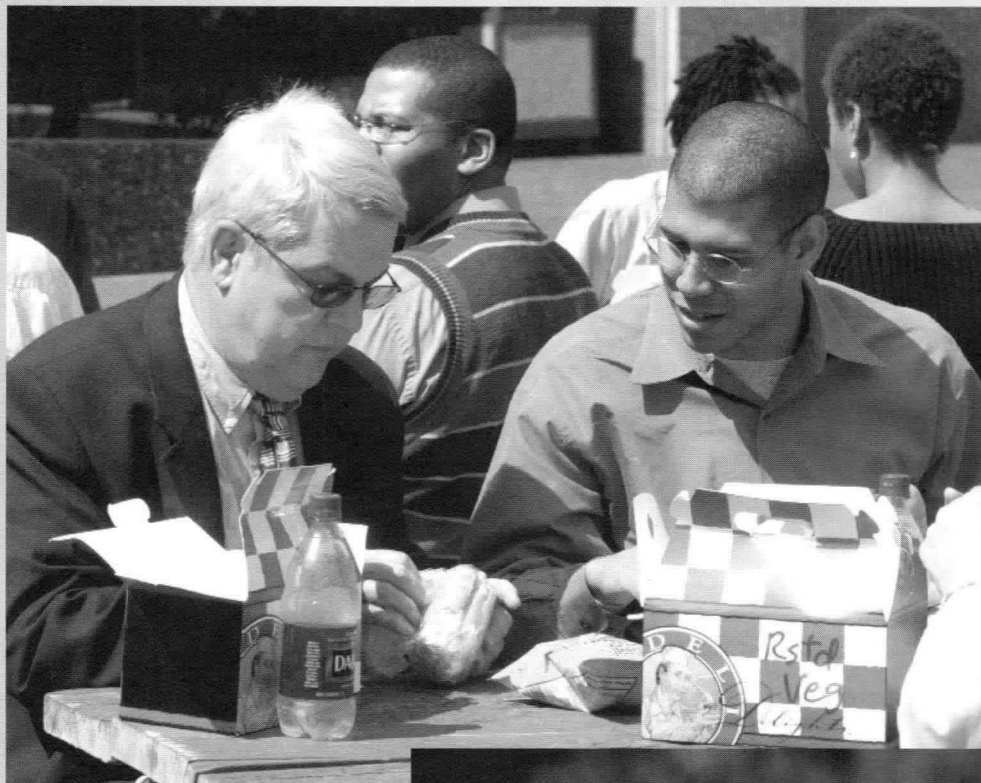
# Summers of Discovery Program Revamped

## Looking for the 'Brightest and the Best'; Program will Focus on Mentoring

The Summers of Discovery Program has grown up.

Summertime at NIEHS used to mean an influx of as many as 125 high school and college students, post docs and teachers. But this year the number of slots has been reduced to 50-60, with the focus shifting back to quality instead of quantity.

And there are other changes in store as well.



Mike Hogan, above, returns to NIEHS, where he has lunch with the Meyerhoff Scholars. NIEHS' Summers of Discovery program, which Hogan created, has been revamped this year to shift the focus back to the quality of the mentoring. Right, Shree Whitaker, a post doc, and Mike Resnick, head of the chromosome stability section of the Laboratory of Molecular Genetics, concentrate on the speaker. Resnick and a number of other researchers gave presentations on the work done in their labs, had some lunch and mingled with the students.

Photos by Steve McCaw, Image Associates

Program Coordinator Charle League took over responsibility for administering the program when its founder, Mike Hogan, retired last year. These summer students will only work under tenured scientists who are willing and able to provide mentoring.

"We want it to be a quality mentoring experience," League said.

The selection process will be tougher, with more emphasis on academics and science. Instead of weekly seminars, there will probably be a day or two of presentations to provide a basic foundation of knowledge early on in the program.

League said it is intended to be a hands-on scientific experience for the students and teachers, but under the revisions will likely be a better experience for the mentors as well.

On March 25, a group of Meyerhoff Scholars from the University of Maryland



Baltimore County came to check out NIEHS and hear from NIEHS researchers. The Meyerhoff Scholarship program is intended to address the shortage of African American and other minorities in the sciences and engineering. NIEHS officials hope to draw students from programs like the Meyerhoff Scholars to the Summers of Discovery program.