

New York, New York: Weill Cornell Celebrates Employees Amid Big Apple Icons

Close to 7,500 employees of Weill Cornell Medical College and New York-Presbyterian Hospital/Weill Cornell gathered in the Garden Café on Thursday, March 2, to celebrate Employee Appreciation Day. The event, along with similar festivities held at off-campus sites including 575 Lexington Ave. and 100 Broadway, was organized to honor the hard work of employees over the past 12 months and included a celebratory meal and an opportunity to visit with co-workers.

“This is an occasion to celebrate all of our employees and let them know how much we value and appreciate their hard work and dedication,” said Dr. Antonio Gotto Jr., dean of Weill Cornell Medical College.

With a theme of “New York, New York,” the Café was decked out with iconic New York City images, from a living Statue of Liberty and a façade of Radio City Music Hall, to the E-Z Pass signs many commuters see each morning on their way to work.

To show their appreciation, managers and members of senior leadership stepped behind the service line and offered employees a “Taste of Little Italy,” with an Italian-themed menu that featured chicken marsala, cheese calzones, vegetables, fruit and Italian ices for dessert. There was one item outside of the Italian theme, however.

“This wouldn’t be New York without street vendors, so we had hot-dog carts as well!” said Wendy Schwan, senior recognition activities specialist at the Center for Organizational & Leadership Effectiveness at Weill Cornell.

Employees also enjoyed the opportunity to dine with staff from other departments that they may not traditionally get to see during their hectic workday.

With more than 1,200 pounds of chicken and 400 cases of soda and water available, employees came out en masse to enjoy the festivities. By 1:30 p.m., a line of Weill Cornell employees several city blocks long coursed its way out of the Garden Café and through the basement corridors of the Hospital, causing one New York City police officer who was on hand to proclaim, “Now this is what I call a line-up!”

###

Summit Calls Attention to Neglected Cancer

Clinicians from around New York City discussed the dangers of a common yet often misunderstood killer at the 3rd Annual Colorectal Cancer Summit on March 2, hosted by the Jay Monahan Center for Gastrointestinal Health at Weill Cornell Medical College.

The summit of the Citywide Colon Cancer Control Coalition (C5)—a partnership of New York City and state government health-care agencies, patient and community groups, and local health-care professionals—served to kick off Colorectal Cancer Awareness Month and discuss continuing strategies for early detection and prevention of the disease among New Yorkers.

The morning conference, held in Uris Auditorium, featured a progress report on colonoscopy use in the five boroughs, as well as updates on initiatives by the New York State Department of Health and legislative activities by the American Cancer Society. In the afternoon, members of the C5 coalition discussed ongoing projects, including screening employees of the New York City Fire Department for colon cancer, making presentations on colon cancer at hospitals throughout the city, and distributing Colon Cancer Screening Action kits that contain prevention guidelines and educational materials for patients in underserved areas. Dr. Mark Pochapin, director of the Jay Monahan Center for Gastrointestinal Health, also discussed the Taxi Cab Colon Cancer Screening Campaign, which utilizes the advertising space on 50 New York City taxis, reminding New Yorkers to get screened for the disease.

Colorectal cancer is the second-leading cause of cancer death in the United States, and affects men and women equally. It is the leading cause of cancer death among non-smokers. More than 147,000 Americans will be diagnosed with colorectal cancer this year and some 55,000 will die from it, with nearly 1,500 deaths in New York City alone. It is estimated that some 250,000 New Yorkers over the age of 50 have undetected colon polyps. Without early detection and treatment, up to 20,000 of these people will develop cancer in the next two decades.

The most effective method of prevention is the colonoscopy, a procedure that can detect potentially pre-cancerous polyps before any physical symptoms occur. The American Cancer Society, a C5 partner, recommends that people 50 or older be screened regularly, as well as individuals with a family history of the disease. Nevertheless, according to the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, only half of New Yorkers in this age group reported ever having a test, leaving more than 1 million adults at risk for undetected colon cancer.

In her keynote address, Graciela Rogerio, medical news producer for WABC-TV and herself a colon cancer survivor, discussed what she called the “hubris of good health”—the idea that people who lead a healthy lifestyle believe they cannot get sick.

“I didn’t think this could happen to me,” Rogerio said, noting that a single test might have prevented the stage-IV cancer that gave her a 1 in 10 chance of survival. But she said her diagnosis forced many of her colleagues and friends to face getting screened for the disease.

“There’s no greater motivation than having it come close to you,” Rogerio said.

###

Reaching Out: Mentors Help Students Apply the Scientific Method Inside, and Out of, the Classroom

One hundred and fifteen seventh-grade students from East Side Middle School piled into the basement gym at Olin Hall on Wednesday, March 8, to present their research findings on some of life's bigger questions: Who has a better memory, boys or girls? Does the color of food affect how it tastes? Can listening to music help students study?

Students presented their work as part of the Ninth Annual Cornell Science Challenge Fair, the culmination of a mentorship program that connects the seventh-graders with faculty, graduate students and postdoctoral fellows from Weill Cornell, Sloan-Kettering and The Rockefeller University to assist them on the finer points of the scientific method. But it was clearly the students' work that was on display.

"The students came up with the idea," said Aditya Venugopal, a mentor and first-year graduate student at Weill Cornell. "I helped on a few little things, giving them tips in the right direction."

According to Alicia Pilgrim, the students' teacher at East Side, students study the scientific method in the fall, learning the basics of observation, forming hypotheses and conducting experiments. The students then break into small groups to brainstorm ideas and investigate the mysteries of their universe.

"They are very interested in gender differences," said graduate student Michael Bruno, who co-chaired the student committee that organized this year's event. "I mean, they are 12 years old, its boys vs. girls."

But even in that respect, the designs were scientific. In the project "Does Gender Affect Memory," students tested the following hypothesis: If gender is related to memory, then girls will remember more than boys will.

Seventh-grader Alison Wong said the project "wasn't sexist," but was based on established memory research and that even the boys in the group agreed the girls probably had better memories after reviewing the research. Using a set pattern of 22 images, the team tested which gender could recall the most after 30 seconds of observation. The students found that gender had no significant effect on memory.

"It was fun testing our hypothesis," said Wong. "I actually wanted to learn about this."

Other projects were born out of real-life situations. "Does the Color of Food Affect the Perception of Taste," which used common foods dyed with coloring, was inspired by the Heinz marketing campaign that introduced green, pink, and other colored ketchups across the country in 2000.

"It came from the old saying 'don't judge a book by its cover,'" said Max Myirsk, a student on the project. Overcoming obstacles along the way ("Little technical difficulties, like forgetting the

oatmeal at home”), the team members found that, for the majority of students, color had little effect on the taste of foods.

The Cornell Science Challenge was started in 1997 by two Weill Cornell graduate students who saw the program as mutually beneficial; mentors would have the opportunity to see what was happening in the community and how science was both perceived and taught, while students would receive expert training beyond what is traditionally available in New York City classrooms.

“The point is to have the students learn the scientific method as it is needed to help them in their personal lives and at whatever profession they may choose,” says Dr. Sara Glickstein, one of the co-founders of the Cornell Science Challenge and currently an instructor in the Department of Neurology.

Now in its ninth year, the program has expanded tenfold and regularly provides at least two dozen mentors for more than 100 students. And the students, at least, see no limit to what the program can achieve.

“One year I had a group that wanted to clone a gene and make genetically modified plants,” says Deirdre McGarrigle, a graduate student and co-chair of the organizing committee. “The kids come up with fantastic ideas, so we need to help them find the question they are interested in and then think of a practical way of examining that question for their level of expertise and timeframe.”

Of course, some students knew exactly what they would do if they could only break free from the practical constraints of a seventh-grade classroom.

“It’s not like it’s taken so seriously,” said Dominique Roses, who was on the “Sound/Memory” team that was runner-up for most creative project. “If it was an experiment for the government, we would have done a much better job. We would have increased our sample size.”

Awards were presented by Dr. Max Gomez, medical reporter for WNBC-TV Channel 4 News and a former postdoctoral fellow at The Rockefeller University.

Best Scientific Method

“Can You Tell the Difference Between Tap, Bottled and Distilled Water?”

Stacey Levtsenko
Amanda Stern
Jerry Chen
Danielle Imbriano

Most Creative

“Does the Word Affect One's Ability to Recognize the Color of the Word?”
Emily Lam

Remy Stern-Beckerman
Lily Chiu
Ben Steele
Matija Cupac

Best Presentation

“Does Music Improve Memory When Studying for a Reading Comprehension Test?”

Jessica Tenenbaum
Doris McGill
Brian Yan
Kalea Shuler
Besnik Vinovic
Tyler White
Talieq Singletary

Junior Judge

“Is Plant Growth Affected by Musical Stimuli?”

Rachel Mandel
Reza Malek
James Zebooker
Penelope Vargus
Kim Kyu Young

Best Scientific Method Runner-Up

“Does pH of Water Affect the Growth of Plants?”

Evan Espinoza
Alaina Halpin
Amanda Wong
Yamato Hart
Daniel Kallick

Most Creative Runner-Up

“Sound/Memory”

Dominique Roses
Nomi Zimmer
Caner Yildiz
Evan Kirchmer
Shayne Courtemanche

Best Presentation Runner-Up

“Does the Type of Music Playing Affect Short-Term Memory?”

Danielle Grigorovich
Julien Simom
Tommy Su
Susanna Chu
Esther Choi

People's Choice

“Does the Brightness of Light Affect Visual Acuity?”

Natali Ortiz
Lori Ettinger
Bilan Haji-Mohamed
Lyvasco Fough
Amy Xu

###

Department of Anesthesiology Holds Second Successful Research Expo

Faculty from the Department of Anesthesiology displayed their research at the second annual Anesthesiology Research Expo, a weeklong presentation that culminated with a special guest lecture and celebration on March 2. Twenty-one poster projects decorated the halls of the anesthesiology department, showcasing studies from Weill Cornell faculty in wide-ranging topics that included analgesia, pain management and surveys of practices among physicians.

“Our research expo provides exposure for the department’s diverse research activities in clinical and basic research to faculty, residents and medical students,” said Dr. Hugh Hemmings Jr., professor of anesthesiology and pharmacology and vice chair for research in anesthesiology at Weill Cornell. “Medical students interested in a career in anesthesiology have the opportunity to meet our research faculty and sample the current areas of research in the department.”

The event featured a lecture entitled “The Fault Lies Not in Our Stars but in Ourselves: Pharmacogenetics in Pregnancy and Anesthesia” and was delivered by Dr. Richard Smiley, Professor of Clinical Anesthesiology at Columbia University College of Physicians and Surgeons and Chief of Obstetric Anesthesia at NewYork-Presbyterian/Columbia. Dr. Smiley discussed four studies outlining how differences in genotype affect responses to pharmaceuticals in obstetric patients, and more specific to anesthesia, how genotype (a single nucleotide polymorphism) affects opioid receptor sensitivity.

The Anesthesiology Research Expo underscores the broad research interests of the Department of Anesthesiology and its continued dedication to advances in patient care.

“Research is essential to the continued development of improved drugs and approaches that are crucial to the practice of anesthesiology,” Dr. Hemmings said. “This annual event celebrates the important contributions from our department to this development.”

###