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Students Honored for Winning Essays on Biomedical Research, Science Projects

*Awards Presented at PSBR Annual Dinner by State Special Deputy Secretary
Paul McKellips Speaks to the Need for and Threat to Animal-based Medical Research*

CAMP HILL, PA – June 1, 2010 – “For all my life I had been absolutely against animal testing, but it all changed the day my mother was rushed to the emergency room.” So begins one of the winning submissions in the 19th annual essay contest for high school students sponsored by the Pennsylvania Society for Biomedical Research (PSBR). Another winning essay, addressed to Mama and Papa, is a fictional letter home from “Bernard C. Mouse” about the value he is contributing to finding new medicines that can help both humans and animals.

This year, 391 students from 59 schools wrote essays that answered the question, “Why are Animals Used in Biomedical Research?” Winners were selected after three rounds of judging by PSBR members and friends, whose decisions were based on identifying students who demonstrated a superior understanding of the topic and artfully conveyed their ideas in writing.

Awards were also presented to winners of the 15th annual PSBR essay contest for 7th and 8th grade students. This year, 116 students from 39 schools wrote essays that answered the question, “What’s the Point of Biomedical Research?”

“The essay contests marry the science of animal research with the art of writing, requiring students to apply their skills in both subjects within a single project,” says Paula A. Clifford, PSBR executive director. One of the strategic goals of PSBR is to educate students about the role of animals in biomedical research, and the essay contests are a major component in that undertaking.

The winners were honored at the PSBR annual dinner on May 25 at the Villanova Conference Center in Radnor, receiving cash awards of between \$100 to \$500. Each winner also received a letter of congratulations from Gov. Ed Rendell, which was delivered by Jessie Smith, special deputy secretary for dog law enforcement, Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture. The Governor wrote that he is “always excited to hear of talented students who demonstrate a real passion for learning and the motivation to use their knowledge and skills outside of the classroom... Your knowledge and skill in the craft of writing will open worlds of opportunity as you pursue your academic career in your special interest.”

Animal research saves lives

The keynote presentation, by Paul McKellips, added perspective to the issue of animal-based biomedical research, touching on the great public need for better medical therapies and the severe challenges and threats such research faces. McKellips, executive vice president, Foundation for Biomedical Research (FBR), is a driving force behind the national ResearchSaves awareness

campaign and initiated the Animal Research Minute podcast, broadcast daily to 3,500 radio stations nationwide.

McKellips related that before joining FBR, “As John Q. Citizen – not following biomedical research; not following how medical discoveries take place – I did not understand that some people aren’t thrilled with how we get to discoveries.” Now he understands both the need for and threat to animal-based biomedical research. He compared the 1.2 million American deaths in seven U.S. wars over 234 years, from the American Revolution to Vietnam, with the 1.6 million Americans who died in a single year, 2006, from seven diseases, from heart disease and cancer to Alzheimer’s and pneumonia.

Against the backdrop of this great need for better medical advances, McKellips talked about the roadblocks to biomedical research – and researchers – posed by a lack of information or misinformation, animal advocacy groups, extreme activists and declining public support. The ResearchSaves educational and awareness campaign, rolled out in 2009, is one effort to improve public understanding of the essential role animals play in medical research. Through videos, billboards, podcasts and other media, ResearchSaves conveys heartfelt stories and messages about how scientific research using animals is essential to developing safe and effective life-saving and life-enhancing medications and therapies for humans and animals.

More award-winning students

Other honorees of the evening included winners of the Technology Student Awards, hosted by the Pennsylvania Technology Student Association and supported by PSBR, and the PSBR Special Award winners for both the Montgomery County Science Research Competition and the Delaware Valley Science Fairs.

Two students presented their winning science projects at the dinner: Gazelle Zerafati, from The Baldwin School, who did research on Canavan disease; and Elizabeth Wilkins, from Penn View Christian School, who researched cryotherapy (sucking on ice chips) to reduce certain side effects of chemotherapy in breast cancer patients.

About PSBR: The Pennsylvania Society for Biomedical Research was established to promote a better public understanding of the value of animal-based biomedical research. Its membership comes from universities, medical schools, pharmaceutical firms and professional societies in Pennsylvania, Delaware and New Jersey. PSBR focuses on educating students about the vital role played by the responsible use of animals in improving the quality of human and animal health; advocating for public policies that support responsible animal-based research; and informing the public and key stakeholders about animal research issues. PSBR strongly supports the continued role of animals in research when no reliable alternative exists. Visit www.psbr.org.

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