

Dear Colleagues:

Winter/Spring 2008

Our long-time dream of a physical identity for the College of Public Health at the University of Iowa is coming closer to reality. In September the State Board of Regents gave its approval for the UI to proceed with a new building for the College, and on October 12 we held a groundbreaking ceremony.

A crowd of supporters gathered on a cool, sunny afternoon to hear remarks by Dean Merchant and other speakers and then watch as the first shovelfuls of dirt were turned with “golden” shovels. We came together at the location of the new building—an elevated 2.5-acre site north of the College of Medicine that offers views of the river and the Old Capitol dome and is accessible to the health sciences campus over a footbridge.

Design of the \$47.7 million facility has been completed by a team of two architectural firms, Payette and Associates (Boston) and Rorhbach Associates, PC (Iowa City). A central feature of the new building is an



The exterior of the new building will be constructed of limestone and glass with metal panel accents designed to complement existing University buildings and the natural environment of the site.

but we will also continue to operate as usual at IREH, utilizing its specialized laboratories, conference rooms and other resources.

Designed with an open, spacious interior, the new College of Public Health will house offices, classrooms, computer labs, a café and student lounge.

emphasis on green” technology,” such as reflective roofing, use of natural lighting, and permeable paving systems that reduce runoff. The University plans to seek certification for the structure within the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) Green Building Rating System.

We anticipate construction starting in the spring and project completion in the summer of 2010. The new building will be financed by a combination of state and federal funding, university revenue bonds, and private gifts. OEH faculty, students, and many staff will have office space in the new facility,



On hand to for the groundbreaking ceremony were [l to r] Iowa Sen. Robert Dvorsky, Regent Robert Downer, UI President Sally Mason, Congressman Dave Loebsack, Dean James Merchant, and UI Foundation President Lynette Marshall.

State legislators often lack the information needed to make decisions on environmental health issues—or they may receive information only from special interest groups and professional lobbyists. And “research” usually means reviewing laws passed in other states, rather than information from academic sources.

Last October a very successful event, “Environmental Health Issues in the Midwest: A Two-Day Workshop for Midwest State Legislators,” was co-sponsored by our department’s Iowa Superfund Basic Research Program (isbrp) and Environmental Health Sciences Research Center (EHSRC), in collaboration with the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL). The two-day workshop attracted legislators and legislative staff from Iowa, Minnesota, Nebraska, Illinois, Wisconsin and Missouri.

Participants heard presentations on four topics that reflect the research being conducted in these centers:
1) polychlorinated biphenyl (PCB) contamination in the Great Lakes region. Drs. Larry Robertson and Keri Hornbuckle of the isbrp and Dave Wethington of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers described isbrp projects that involve monitoring exposures and investigating sources of PCBs in Chicago and East Chicago, Indiana.



[left to right] Dr. Keri Hornbuckle, Wisconsin State Assemblyman Spencer Black, Dr. Larry Robertson, Mr. Dave Wethington

2) the environmental effects of confined animal feeding operations(CAFOs) - Dr. Peter Thorne (isbrp, EHSRC) compared CAFO regulations in the European Union and the US. Dr. David Wallinga of the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy in Minneapolis discussed the effects on human health of drugs used in animal agriculture.

3) health effects of mercury - Dr. Victoria Persky, isbrp researcher from the University of Illinois at Chicago, explained the epidemiology of mercury exposure while EPA Climate Change Coordinator for region 5, Melissa Hulting, focused on one mercury source—coal-fired power plants—and the reductions made possible by utilizing renewable energy.

4) radon - Dr. Bill Field described radon's effects, incidence, and mitigation and clarified the differences in regulations across various Midwestern states. The EPA regional contact for Indoor Air and Radon, Greg Crable, described his agency's efforts to educate the public about radon.



Prof. David Osterberg

Professor David Osterberg (isbrp, EHSRC) helped plan the workshop. He was pleased that “participants were clearly learning from one another as well as from the scientists, which will certainly result in more effective environmental protection among all the states.” As a result of the workshop, David received an invitation from the Chair of the Iowa House Environmental Protection Committee and testified before them on isbrp and EHSRC research.

Several current OEH students have been recognized for their achievements. The 2007 Clyde Berry scholarship from the American Industrial Hygiene Foundation was awarded to IH student Michael Humann. Mike received his MS in industrial hygiene from our department in 2002 and then came back to earn a doctorate and a certificate in agricultural safety and health. His doctoral work involves assessing task-based noise exposure—data that can be used to estimate daily noise exposures for grain farmers.



Michael Humann



Alysha Meyers, with Mr. David Neil, Iowa's Labor Services Commissioner (left) and OEH faculty member Dr. Bill Hietbrink.

Two other students, Alysha Meyers and Ian Poole, received Iowa Governor's Safety Conference scholarships last November. Alysha is working on several doctoral projects, which focus on occupational ergonomics among construction and manufacturing workers. In particular, she wants to assess the reliability of tools that can be used by non-experts since the shortage of board-certified ergonomists has led to safety managers and others conducting workplace assessments. Alysha has also helped develop the ergonomics portion of an online database created by the Center for Construction Research and Training (www.cpwr.com/service-constructionsol.html).

Ian earned his bachelor's degree from Iowa State in Industrial Technology with a focus on occupational safety. In May he will complete his master's degree in industrial hygiene; meanwhile he has already taken a position as a safety manager for a nationwide electrical contractor (Rosendin Electric). On assignment at the Story Wind Farm site in Story County, Iowa, he is implementing safety programs and training for the Rosendin employees.



Ian Poole, being congratulated by Labor Services Commissioner David Neil, as Ian's advisor Dr. Hietbrink looks on.

For several years we have been discussing with Pioneer Hi-Bred the possibility of supporting an endowed faculty chair in our department. Now those discussions have resulted in a \$1.5 million contribution by DuPont, Pioneer's parent company, for an OEH faculty position dedicated to promoting rural safety and health. The gift, which was administered by Pioneer and made through the UI Foundation, will further strengthen our department's leadership role in teaching and research related to rural health and safety. We are deeply grateful for this generous support and are now actively seeking applicants for the position. Please let me know of any potential candidates (the job description can be accessed at www.public-health.uiowa.edu/oeh/employment/EndowedChairPosition_Feb08.pdf).

This year it seems appropriate to assert that neither snow nor sleet nor freezing rain will stop the progress and good work of our OEH colleagues (and fortunately spring is just around the corner).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Craig Zwierling".

Craig Zwierling, MD, PhD, MPH
Professor and Head

Department of Occupational and Environmental Health