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UT Researchers Honored at Innovation Awards

KNOXVILLE – Sixty-five University of Tennessee researchers were recognized Friday for their discoveries at the 2013 University of Tennessee Research Foundation (UTRF) Innovation Awards. Each of the inventors honored at the event had, in the past three years, received a patent from the US Patent and Trademark Office (USPTO), developed a technology that was licensed to an outside company, or in some cases, both.

“The University’s strategic plan calls for us to promote the application and commercialization of research to improve the economy and expand business and industry in the State of Tennessee,” said David Washburn, president and CEO of UTRF. “This celebration gives us the opportunity to recognize the innovators at UT who are making major contributions that improve the quality of life in our state and beyond.”

The faculty members honored today are affiliated with UT Knoxville, UT Institute of Agriculture, UT Space Institute and the Graduate School of Medicine. In all, 48 patents have been issued from these inventions in the last three years. In addition, UTRF executed 31 license transactions in the same three year period. Some faculty members worked in teams, and some faculty members have more than one patent or license agreement. Faculty at the UT Health Science Center will be recognized in December in Memphis.

Patents are awarded for unique technologies and serve to protect inventions that can benefit society. On average, less than 20 percent of technologies created at UT are eventually granted patents from the USPTO. As a result, the faculty responsible for the discoveries that make it through this process are among the most innovative and dedicated researchers in the university system.

Once a technology or idea is patented, it can then be licensed to outside companies for further development and commercialization. License agreements stemming from patented technologies generate revenue for the university and can be the basis for starting new companies, contributing to local and regional economic development.

UTRF also presented the B. Otto and Kathleen Wheeley Award for Excellence in Technology Transfer. The award is a cash prize given to the member of the UT faculty who has had a major impact on the tech transfer success of the University. This year’s recipients are J. Douglas Birdwell and Tsewei Wang, both of UT’s College of Engineering.

Birdwell is a professor in the Department of Electrical and Computer Engineering. He has been a faculty member at UT since 1978 and is currently the director of the Laboratory for Information Technologies. He has over 100 publications and has directed over \$10 million in sponsored research projects at UT.

Wang is an associate professor emeritus in the Department of Chemical and Biomolecular Engineering. She joined UT in 1989 as a tenure track assistant professor in the Chemical Engineering Department. She has authored over 50 publications, presentations and peer reviewed journal articles and has directed \$5 million - \$7 million in sponsored research projects at UT. Wang retired from UT in December of 2012 but continues to be active with her research team.



Together, Birdwell and Wang have 21 issued patents, and licensing agreements on their technologies have generated \$1,124,012 in revenue.

“The work of Drs. Birdwell and Wang and their team has had a tremendous impact on the ability of law enforcement agencies around the world to exchange and compare forensic DNA evidence to help solve crimes,” said Washburn. “From inventions in parallel data processing architectures, DNA forensics analysis, and advanced DNA database search techniques – their work aids in identifying missing persons and victims of disasters and crime.”

Inventors recognized for receiving a patent include:

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| Besma Abidi, University of Tennessee, Knoxville | Jimmy Mays, University of Tennessee, Knoxville |
| Raul Almeida, University of Tennessee Institute of Agriculture | Anatoli Melechko, University of Tennessee, Knoxville |
| Gregory Armel, University of Tennessee, Knoxville | Stephen Oliver, University of Tennessee Institute of Agriculture |
| John Birdwell, University of Tennessee, Knoxville | Cristopher Oppert, University of Tennessee Institute of Agriculture |
| Zhiyu Chen, University of Tennessee, Knoxville | Olga Ovchinnikova, University of Tennessee, Knoxville |
| Ying-Ling Chen, University of Tennessee Space Institute | Jared Pendleton, University of Tennessee, Knoxville |
| Feng Chen, University of Tennessee Institute of Agriculture | Hairong Qi, University of Tennessee, Knoxville |
| (Max) Zong-Ming Cheng, University of Tennessee Institute of Agriculture | Carl Sapp, University of Tennessee, Knoxville |
| Suxiang Deng, University of Tennessee, Knoxville | Xiang Shu, University of Tennessee, Knoxville |
| William Hamel, University of Tennessee, Knoxville | Alan Solomon, University of Tennessee Graduate School of Medicine |
| J. Wesley Hines, University of Tennessee, Knoxville | Dale Stansberry, University of Tennessee, Knoxville |
| Roger Horn, University of Tennessee, Knoxville | C. Neal Stewart, University of Tennessee Institute of Agriculture |
| Rudi Hrcic, University of Tennessee Graduate School of Medicine | Jonathan Wall, University of Tennessee Graduate School of Medicine |
| Baoshan Huang, University of Tennessee, Knoxville | Tse-Wei Wang, University of Tennessee, Knoxville |
| David Icove, University of Tennessee, Knoxville | John Wilkerson, University of Tennessee Institute of Agriculture |
| Juan Jurat-Fuentes, University of Tennessee Institute of Agriculture | Rebecca Wilkes, University of Tennessee Institute of Agriculture |
| Stephen Kania, University of Tennessee Institute of Agriculture | Jie (Jayne) Wu, University of Tennessee, Knoxville |
| Richard Komistek, University of Tennessee, Knoxville | Ning Xue, University of Tennessee, Knoxville |
| James Lewis, University of Tennessee Space Institute | Xia Ye, University of Tennessee Institute of Agriculture |
| Douglas Luther, University of Tennessee Institute of Agriculture | Michael Zemel, University of Tennessee Institute of Agriculture |
| | Nan Zhao, University of Tennessee Institute of Agriculture |

UTRF helps inventors at UT turn their ideas and discoveries into products and services that benefit society. In addition to supporting the university research enterprise and commercializing the resulting inventions, UTRF also supports entrepreneurship as well as state and regional economic development efforts. UTRF serves all seven of the UT campuses and institutes across the state. For more information, visit <http://utrf.tennessee.edu>.

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