Stowers Report

FOUNDATIONAL SCIENCE. PROFOUND IMPLICATIONS.

2025

25 YEARS OF
DISCOVERY
INNOVATION
HOPE

Stowers Institute

Stowers Report

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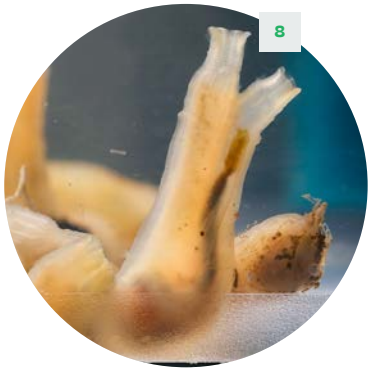
IN THIS ISSUE



FEATURED STORIES

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Visit the Stowers Institute at **www.stowers.org**.

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In Perspective

More than twenty-five years ago, Jim and Virginia Stowers envisioned unprecedented medical breakthroughs arising from deeper insights into biological processes at the molecular level. They pioneered a novel framework for supporting biomedical research and inaugurated the Stowers Institute campus in November 2000.

The Institute's distinctive funding model empowers us to sustain long-term, ambitious projects, continually invest in advanced facilities and technology, and recruit and retain top scientific talent.

Today, the Stowers Institute is a place where curiosity thrives, and science can unfurl its highest ambitions to bring lasting, transformative benefits to humanity. Each day, more than 500 dedicated individuals work to fulfill the audacious and courageous vision of our founders, striving to be a beacon of innovation and intellectual generosity, where rigorous knowledge-seeking is collaborative and universally uplifting.

To be a scientist here means bearing a profound responsibility: to advance our founders' vision with integrity, creativity, and hope. Through our ethos of collaboration, innovation, and teamwork, along with a commitment to human progress, our Institute embodies a pioneering spirit like no other.

With your enduring support, our Institute is poised to fundamentally redefine the possibilities of foundational biomedical research. As we mark a quarter-century of discovery and turn to the next 25 years, the Stowers Institute will not simply keep pace with scientific progress—it will help define it. •

Alejandro Sánchez Alvarado, Ph.D.

PRESIDENT AND CHIEF SCIENTIFIC OFFICER

Research & Discovery

An experiment that worked

STOWERS INSTITUTE CELEBRATES 25 YEARS OF DISCOVERY, INNOVATION, AND HOPE

Philanthropists and visionaries Jim and Virginia Stowers opened the campus of the Stowers Institute for Medical Research in Kansas City, Missouri, 25 years ago in November 2000. They bestowed the Institute with an ambitious and selfless mission — to understand how life works at its most foundational level for the betterment of humanity.

Stowers science has flourished and continues to do so in large part due to Jim and Virginia's generosity and vision. Both cancer survivors, Jim and Virginia gave the majority of their fortune toward building a world-class biomedical research institution. They distinctly ensured that their gift would endure far into the future by creating a unique funding model whereby more than 40% of annual dividends from American Century Investments, a firm founded by Jim Stowers in 1958, directly support the Institute.

Many thought that creating a prominent scientific center in the Midwest was impossible. But Jim and Virginia, partnering with founding President and CEO William "Bill" Neaves, Ph.D., and founding Scientific Director Robb Krumlauf, Ph.D., created a scientific environment of innovation and curiosity, recruiting and hiring the best scientists from around the globe, and supporting their research with state-of-the-art Technology Centers unlike any other institution in the country.

Today, the Stowers Institute thrives thanks to the astute direction of the founders and initial leadership team.

Discovery, innovation, and hope distinguished the Institute's first 25 years and will define the next. As our founders were fond of saying, "The best is yet to be." •

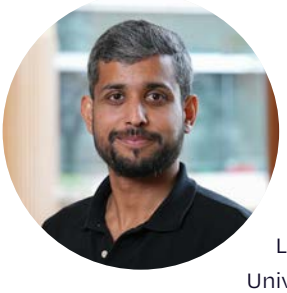
Broadening our research scope

FOUR NEW SCIENTISTS JOIN THE STOWERS INSTITUTE

This year, the Stowers Institute welcomed four new outstanding scientists: Assistant Principal Investigator Arvind Pillai, Ph.D.; Principal Investigator David Stern, Ph.D.; Jim and Virginia Stowers Fellow Friederike Benning, Ph.D.; and AI Fellow Sumner Magruder, Ph.D. The addition of these exceptional researchers is expanding the scope of science at the Institute and ensuring novel biological discoveries far into the future.

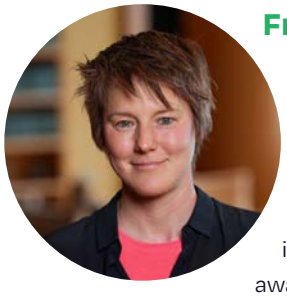
David Stern, Ph.D.

Stern will join the Institute as a Principal Investigator, bringing with him an established lab from Howard Hughes Medical Institute's Janelia Research Campus. His current research is focused on how aphids, small parasitic insects, hijack plant development by manipulating plant genomes to form new structures called galls. Stern's interdisciplinary research combines structural biology, genetics, and computational biology to target a protein aphids make for developing environmentally sustainable next-generation pesticides.



Arvind Pillai, Ph.D.

Pillai joined the Institute as an Assistant Principal Investigator from the lab of 2024 Nobel Laureate David Baker, Ph.D., at the University of Washington and the Institute for Protein Design. Pillai's lab is dedicated to exploring how new protein structures originate during evolution and developing methods to control and harness protein design for potential therapies. Using artificial intelligence and biochemical techniques, Pillai seeks to understand the principles behind protein design: folding, dynamics, form, and function.



Friederike Benning, Ph.D.

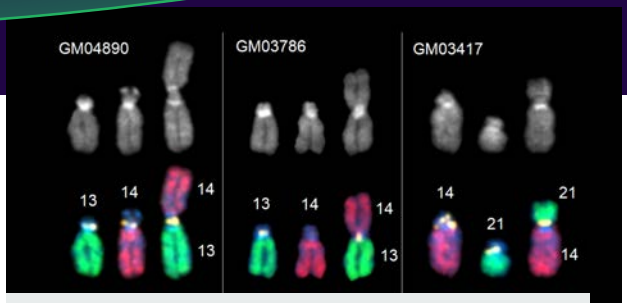
Benning joined the Institute from Harvard University and Massachusetts General Hospital as the latest Jim and Virginia Stowers Fellow — a five-year independent research position awarded to early-career scientists. Benning's research explores the complexity of energy generation in evolution by studying the vast and largely untapped world of bacterial membrane structures — particularly in Alphaproteobacteria — whose ability to adapt and form membrane folds have enabled them to survive in extreme environments.

Sumner Magruder, Ph.D.

Magruder joined the Institute from Yale University as the inaugural AI Fellow, helping shepherd AI across our research community as part of the Institute's AI initiative. Sumner brings an exceptional and interdisciplinary background, drawing from extensive expertise in AI, machine learning, computational biology, and neuroscience. His cross-disciplinary training and perspective uniquely position him to help catalyze new advances at the interface of computational biology and life science. •

Research Highlights

Following is a snapshot of published scientific research from Stowers Institute Investigators in 2025. To read more about recent discoveries, visit www.stowers.org/news.



Robertsonian fusion chromosomes and their normal, non-fused counterparts from three different human cell lines.

Illuminating genomic "dark matter"

PUBLISHED IN *NATURE* ON SEPTEMBER 24, 2025

First observed more than a century ago and the subject of intense scrutiny for 50 years, how exactly Robertsonian chromosomes — two different chromosomes fused together at their centers — arise has remained a mystery. The landmark study from Stowers Institute scientists in the lab of Jennifer Gerton, Ph.D., solved the puzzle.

In collaboration with scientists from the National Human Genome Research Institute and the University of Tennessee Health Science Center, the researchers identified the precise breakpoint that results in the formation Robertsonian chromosomes in humans. Because one out of every 800 people have this genetic anomaly, the study has major implications for understanding infertility, congenital conditions, and chromosome evolution.

"This is the first time anyone has shown where this exact DNA breakpoint occurs," Gerton said. "Bringing together three labs with complementary expertise allowed us to tackle a question that none of us could have answered alone." ●

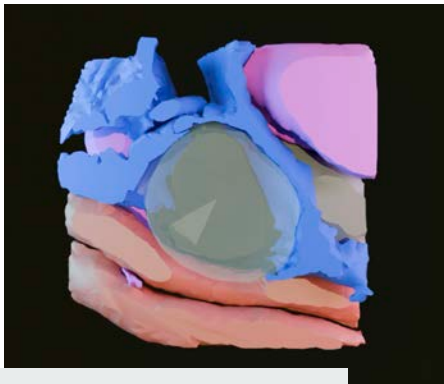
Unraveling the power of planarian stem cells

PUBLISHED IN *CELL REPORTS* ON OCTOBER 15, 2025

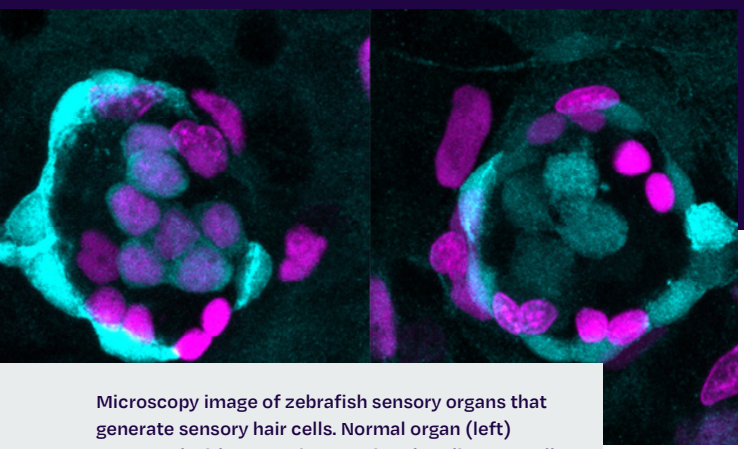
Stem cells within most organisms are tightly regulated by a group of specific cells surrounding them, called a niche. Research led by Frederick Mann, Ph.D., from the lab of Alejandro Sánchez Alvarado, Ph.D., uncovered that the remarkable regenerative capacity of planarian flatworms is linked to stem cells exhibiting more autonomy from their surrounding cells.

This discovery opens new doors to understanding how regeneration may be enhanced by this unusual property of planarian stem cells and provides hope for harnessing this capacity for use in regenerative medicine in humans.

"A proper niche may not be a necessary part of the stem cell equation," said Mann. "To get truly unlimited stem cell potential, planarian stem cells figured out a way to be independent." ●



Three-dimensional rendering of a planarian stem cell (gray, center) with its neighbors. The stem cells reside in complex niches and have a diverse set of neighbors.



Microscopy image of zebrafish sensory organs that generate sensory hair cells. Normal organ (left) compared with a genetic mutation that disrupts cell division of support hair cells (right).

Healing hearing loss

PUBLISHED IN *NATURE COMMUNICATIONS* ON JULY 14, 2025

While humans can regularly replace certain cells, we cannot naturally regrow most other parts of the body. For example, damage to the tiny sensory hair cells in our inner ears often results in permanent hearing loss. In contrast, animals like fish, frogs, and chicks regenerate sensory hair cells effortlessly.

The team, led by Mark Lush, Ph.D., in the lab of Tatjana Piotrowski, Ph.D., discovered that two different genes regulating cell division each control the growth of two key types of sensory support cells for zebrafish sensory hair cell regeneration — active stem cells and progenitors. The cell cycle genes identified have similar counterparts in humans that regulate cell division in systems like those of the blood and gut. Thus, the team's findings may have implications beyond hair cell regeneration.

"By understanding how these cells regenerate in zebrafish, we hope to identify why similar regeneration does not occur in mammals and whether it might be possible to trigger this process in the future," said Piotrowski.

Fighting fungi

PUBLISHED IN *PLOS BIOLOGY* ON JUNE 5, 2025

Fungal infections are responsible for nearly four million deaths annually — however, current treatments are limited and frequently ineffective. A study led by former postdoctoral associate Blake Billmyre, Ph.D., now a professor at the University of Georgia, in the lab of Sarah Zanders, Ph.D., discovered how the lethal pathogenic fungus, *Cryptococcus neoformans*, thrives, allowing the team to identify potential novel therapeutic targets for treatment.

The team optimized a genetic technique to create an atlas of genes essential for the growth of *Cryptococcus*, uncovering more than 300 ideal therapeutic targets.

There is an urgent need for developing new, more effective antifungals with reduced side effects. Zanders said, "This project opens the door to genome-wide screens for important traits in pathogenic fungi and will speed the pace of drug discovery."

Cryptococcus neoformans, a deadly fungal pathogen, growing in culture.

Complete assembly of six ape genomes

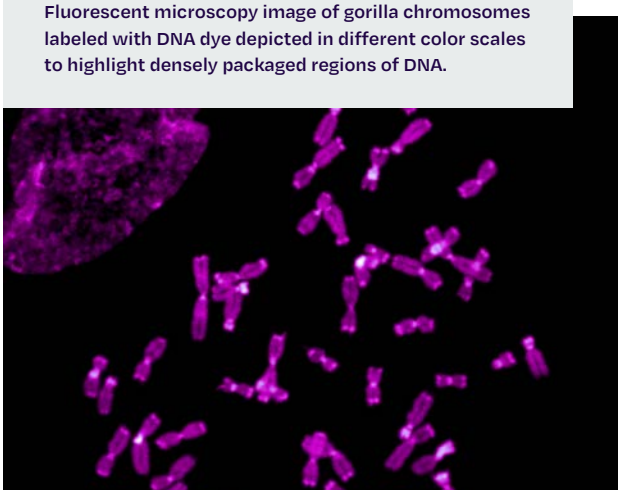
PUBLISHED IN *NATURE* ON APRIL 9, 2025

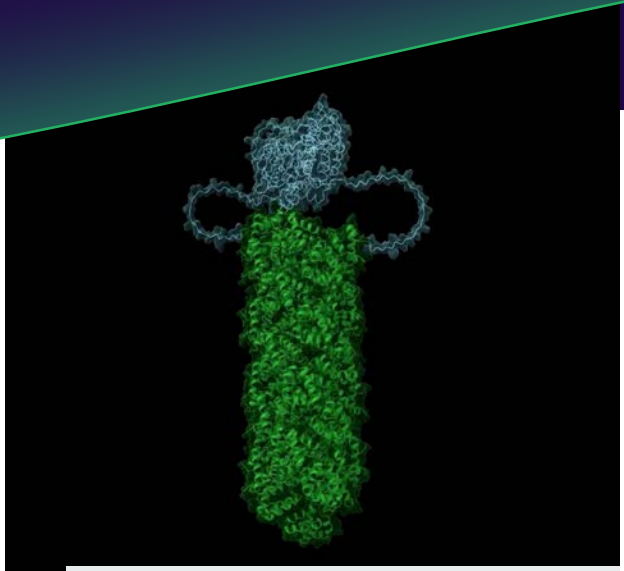
In a significant technical achievement, a multi-institutional study including Stowers scientists in the lab of Jennifer Gerton, Ph.D., sequenced and assembled six ape genomes at unprecedented resolution. The analysis of all chromosomes of chimpanzee, bonobo, gorilla, Bornean orangutan, Sumatran orangutan, and siamang offers insights into both the diversity and evolution of our closest relatives and ourselves.

A key finding was discovering that the arrangement of genes and genetic regions that rapidly evolve could help explain how the environment and evolution shape primates' survival and the development of new species. In addition, the new assemblies may aid in conservation efforts as many primates are endangered.

"These assemblies and comparative data, which are freely available to the scientific community, will be a game-changer in our efforts to understand the stability and evolution of primate chromosomes," said Gerton. ●

Fluorescent microscopy image of gorilla chromosomes labeled with DNA dye depicted in different color scales to highlight densely packaged regions of DNA.





A model showing how "death fold" proteins (green) activate another protein called a caspase (blue), triggering the cell to self-destruct after it's been infected by pathogens.

Aging's "Catch-22"

PUBLISHED IN *ELIFE* ON SEPTEMBER 16, 2025

Some of our biggest threats can come in the tiniest forms — viruses and bacteria. Thankfully, we possess a defense system, innate immunity, that protects us in our youth but can turn against us as we age.

Led by Alex Rodríguez Gama, Ph.D., in the lab of Randal Halfmann, Ph.D., research revealed a common power source driving the assembly of 3D puzzle-like protein formations. These protein "puzzles" help infected cells amplify invasion signals and destroy themselves, triggering inflammation that limits the spread of infection.

"Specific proteins that can quickly assemble are the death decision makers, and the process of their assembly is the decision for the cell to die," said Halfmann. "We are beginning to think that this may be one of the fundamental mechanisms of why we age." ●

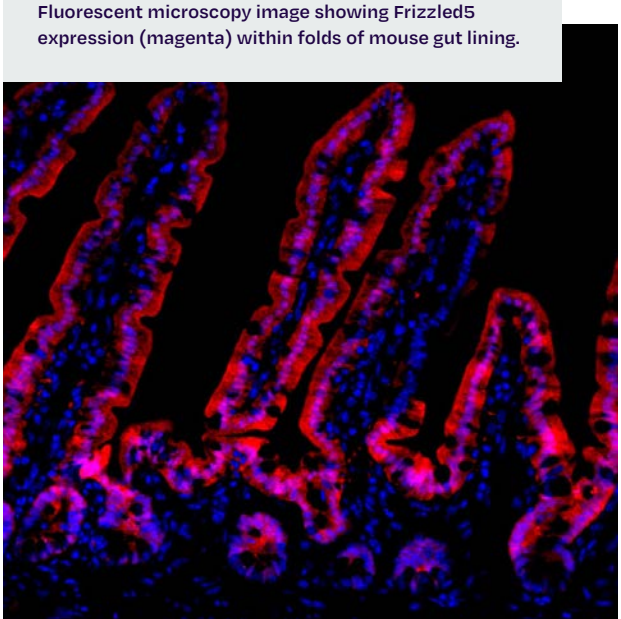
How the gut replenishes stem cells

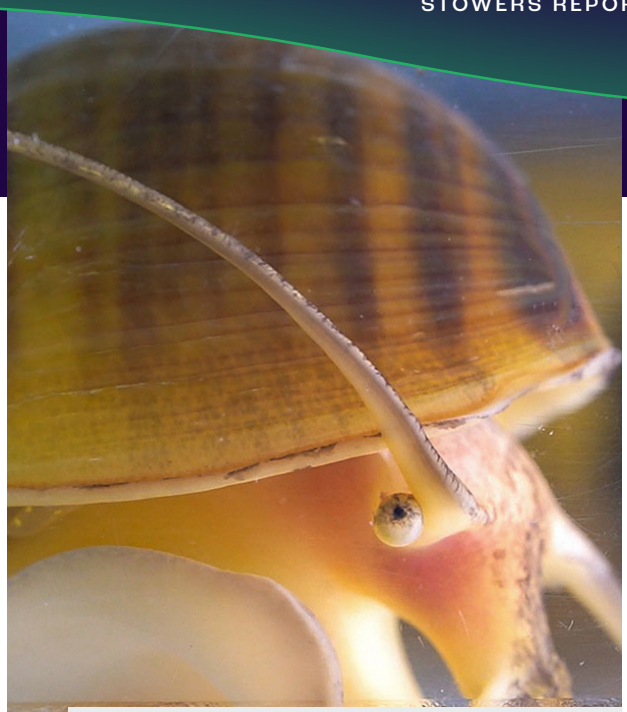
PUBLISHED IN *DEVELOPMENTAL CELL*
ON NOVEMBER 22, 2024

The cells lining the intestine are constantly replaced to ensure healthy gut function. This happens thanks to a population of intestinal stem cells, as well as the flexibility of differentiated mature cells that can revert to a stem-like state when needed.

Research led by Lu Deng, Ph.D., in the lab of Linheng Li, Ph.D., identified a protein called Frizzled5 that plays a critical role in the control of intestinal stem cells. Through novel techniques, sophisticated analyses, and genetic engineering, the study shows that this protein is a master regulator controlling gut tissue health. These findings are significant, notably because intestinal cancers begin when fundamental control systems are lost. This discovery may make Frizzled5 a new biological target to consider in developing treatments for intestinal cancers.

Fluorescent microscopy image showing Frizzled5 expression (magenta) within folds of mouse gut lining.





The apple snail, *Pomacea canaliculata,* inside the Stowers Institute's apple snail facility.

An eye for an eye

PUBLISHED IN *NATURE COMMUNICATIONS*
ON AUGUST 6, 2025

Apple snails are helping scientists learn more about how the eye can regenerate, research that could one day lead to new treatments for human eye diseases like macular degeneration. Though structurally similar to human eyes, the eye of an apple snail has an unusual property — it can regrow itself if injured or amputated.

Led by former postdoctoral researcher Alice Accorsi, Ph.D., now an Assistant Professor at the University of California, Davis, in the lab of Alejandro Sánchez Alvarado, Ph.D., the team developed apple snails as a new system to study sensory organ regeneration.

"We had no way to identify solutions for treating conditions like retinal degeneration or physical injury to the eye," said Sánchez Alvarado. "But nature has answers for us. We now have a tractable system for investigating which genes are responsible during eye regeneration."

Innovation

Solving biological mysteries with new research organisms

Sea squirts, the common name for tunicates, collected in San Diego, California.

Research organisms at the Institute help our scientists solve a biological mystery or answer a scientific question. This year, we welcomed two new research organisms — coral and sea squirts. Both are evolutionarily ancient marine species that traveled far from their typical seaside habitats to relocate in Kansas City.

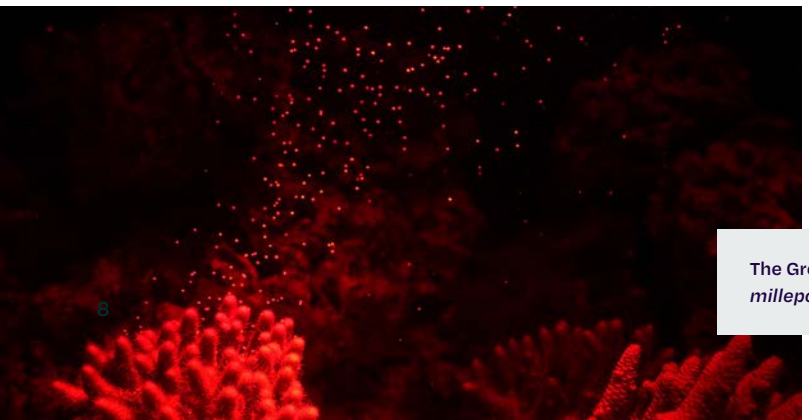
Coral reefs are under threat globally due to climate change. Yet, studying their biology is challenging as they are difficult to raise and breed in aquariums and only reproduce once per year. However, the extensive development and preparation for housing these delicate animals is paying off. Far from the coasts, scientists at the Stowers Institute have a thriving reef-building coral population sourced from Australia's Great Barrier Reef.

Late last November, the specialized tanks and teams of technicians achieved what few other institutions have done — a coral spawning event. The successful sexual reproduction of these corals is enabling scientists in the lab of Investigator Matt Gibson, Ph.D., to gain a more comprehensive understanding of their unique developmental and evolutionary biology. The team's hope is to possibly devise conservation strategies for these ecologically critical and endangered creatures.

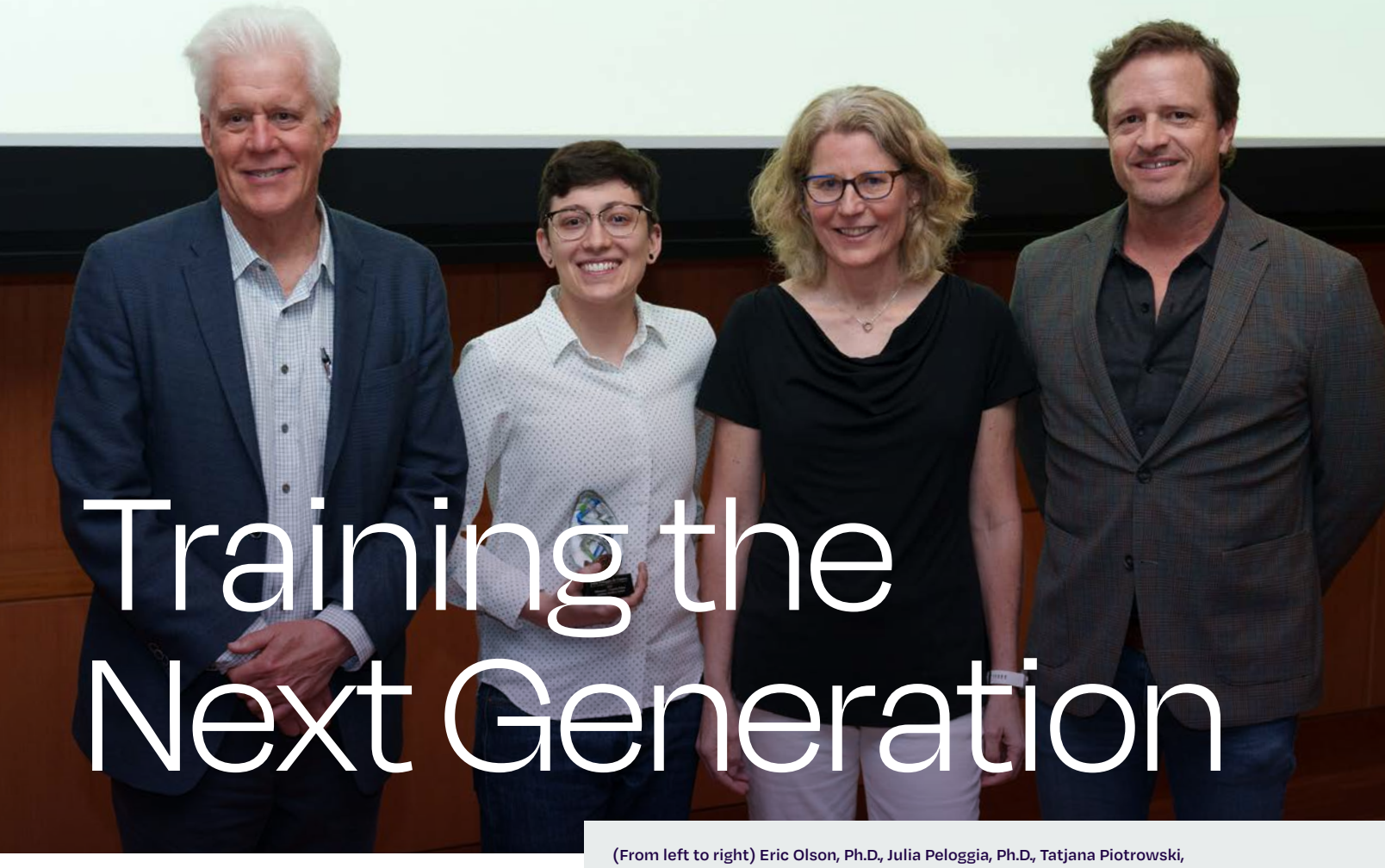
"Because of the critical role of coral reefs in marine ecosystems, this lends a certain urgency to studying their genetics and molecular biology, which may yield solutions for their conservation before it's too late," said Gibson.

Sea squirts, a common name for tunicates, are ancient marine invertebrates that recently joined coral as the newest aquatic animal at the Institute. Similar to coral, research on tunicates has applications toward a greater understanding of evolutionary and developmental biology for animals spanning the tree of life. Investigator Tatjana Sauka-Spengler, Ph.D., investigates the circuitry guiding development in the sea squirt, which may yield new knowledge underlying the genetic pathways governing development in vertebrates including humans.

"We are trying to build gene regulatory networks in non-vertebrate chordates," said Sauka-Spengler. "This may lead to understanding how to alter similar networks in vertebrates that are linked to developmental disorders."



The Great Barrier Reef coral species, *Acropora millepora*, spawning at the Institute.



Training the Next Generation

(From left to right) Eric Olson, Ph.D., Julia Peloggia, Ph.D., Tatjana Piotrowski, Ph.D., Matt Gibson, Ph.D.

Behrensen-Guzmán Palma Award

To honor the memory of Stowers Ph.D. students Camila Behrensen and Pablo Guzmán Palma, the annual Behrensen - Guzmán Palma Graduate Student Award recognizes the most outstanding research paper by a graduate student at the Stowers Institute for Medical Research.

The Stowers Scientific Advisory Board (SAB) selects the award winner based on the highest standards of scientific excellence, experimental creativity, and/or technical innovation. This year's recipient was former Ph.D. student Julia Peloggia, Ph.D., now a postdoctoral fellow at UCLA, from the lab of Tatjana Piotrowski, Ph.D. Peloggia's 2024 *Development* publication revealed that environmental factors, alongside genetics, play a crucial role in guiding the growth of sensory organs. The findings underscore that development displays high flexibility — an insight that may be critical for understanding how aquatic animals can adapt in a changing climate.

Senior Research Associate Ayantika Sen Gupta, Ph.D.

Career support through Faculty EDGE

Postdoctoral researchers at the Stowers Institute not only have access to exceptional technology and mentorship, but they also receive career training through Faculty EDGE.

The annual series is an immersive experience to help postdocs feel empowered and armed with confidence to take next steps toward securing a position as a faculty member.

The Faculty EDGE Workshop, a two-day event, provides postdocs the opportunity to present their research and practice their chalk talks. This simulated interview setting includes internal and external faculty members who offer valuable feedback for participating postdocs to be competitive applicants.

Scientific Advisory Board member Mike Levine, Ph.D.

Celebrating our 2025 Graduates

Graduates of the Graduate School of the Stowers Institute for Medical Research are the confirmation that the school's mission — to prepare a superb cadre of scientists from around the world for the pursuit of innovative and creative investigation in the biological sciences — is working.

The Stowers Graduate School celebrated seven Ph.D. program graduates this year, joining 33 alumni for total of 40 students who have earned doctoral degrees in biology since the program's commencement in 2012.

"Earning a doctoral degree is a public trust," said Stowers Investigator and President of the Graduate School Matt Gibson, Ph.D.

"Your impact is just beginning with the rigor, creativity and curiosity that you cultivated here," added Stowers Investigator and Dean of the Graduate School Jennifer Gerton, Ph.D. "We are immensely proud to send you forward in your professional lives with the amazing spirit of this Institute and this gift of hope for life that came from Jim and Virginia Stowers." •

The 2025 class of the Stowers Graduate School

TRAINING THE FUTURE LEADERS OF BIOLOGY

In August, the Stowers Graduate School welcomed 11 exceptional students to its Ph.D. program. Hailing from around the globe, the 2025 class is comprised of high-caliber, early-career scientists who will gain the training, mentorship, and collaborative skills necessary to become the next leaders transforming the field of biology. •

Catalina Diaz Ramirez
Universidad de Concepcion

Zixuan Ding
Wuhan University

Jenny Duong
Newman University

Matthew Gilley
Truman State University

Erica Lin
University of Miami

Grishma Mehta
Indian Institute of Science Education and Research (Iiser), Pune

Madison Mitchell
University of Missouri - Columbia

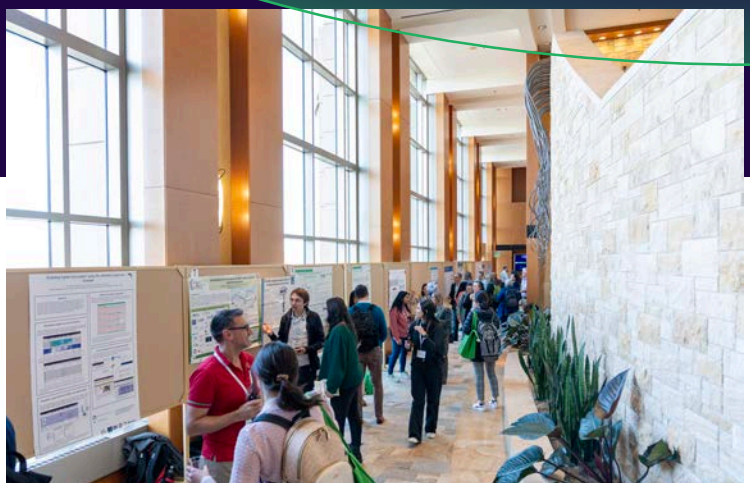
Yamile Paredes Chiquini
Universidad Nacional Autonoma de Mexico (Unam) - Facultad de Medicina

Pritam Pathank
Indian Institute of Science Education and Research (Iiser), Pune

Laura Sancho Salazar
Minerva University

Nino Zhuzhunadze
Minerva University

Convening Power



Advancing scientific discovery

Scientific conferences hosted at the Stowers Institute provide a platform for novel collaborations between leaders and early-career scientists in the field of biology.

Spring conferences at the Institute included the 18th Annual International Biocuration Conference, a meeting focused on the process of collecting, organizing, annotating, and validating biological data to create community-accessible databases. Additionally, Stowers Investigators Jennifer Gerton, Ph.D., and Paul Trainor, Ph.D., co-organized OddPols 2025, the "International Conference on Transcription by RNA polymerases I, III, IV, and V." The conference hosted scientists studying how cells make RNA and build ribosomes, key processes in all forms of life.

Investigator Julia Zeitlinger, Ph.D., co-organized the American Society for Biochemistry and Molecular Biology conference, "ASBMB Evolution and core processes in gene expression." The meeting focused on how gene regulation and evolution shape the diversity of life.

In the Fall, Investigator Tatjana Sauka-Spengler, Ph.D., and the Stowers Institute hosted the XII Avian Model Systems Meeting, "Research Organisms in Flight: Revealing the Roots of Vertebrate Form and Function." The conference showcased avian models as powerful systems to advance scientific research across fields including developmental biology, neuroscience, genomics, medicine and evolution.

Stowers Research Conferences, a meeting series geared toward highlighting the latest scientific advances while promoting the development of early-career scientists, was held in October. Co-organized by Associate Investigator Randal Halfmann, Ph.D., Assistant Investigator Arvind Pillai, Ph.D., and Director of Scientific Data Jay Unruh, Ph.D., the conference focused on the transformative potential of AI to revolutionize our understanding of complex protein behaviors.

In Memoriam

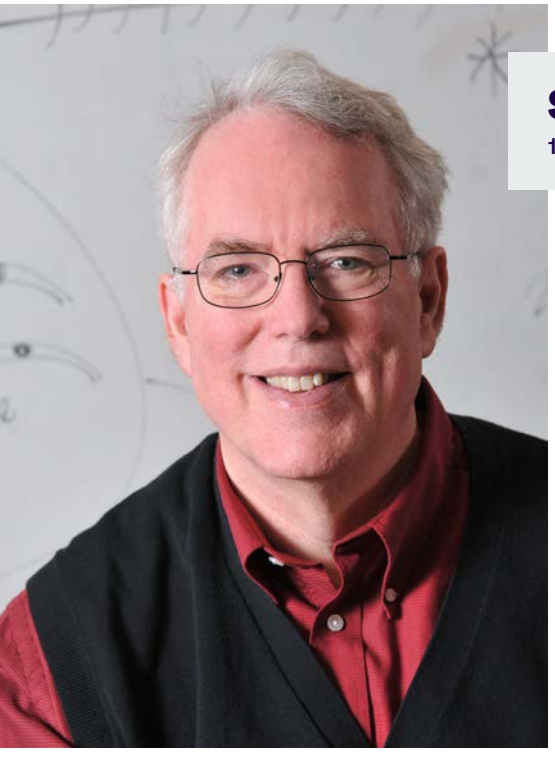
Richard "Dick" Brown

1946 - 2025

Richard W. "Dick" Brown, Chairman of the Stowers Institute for Medical Research and Chairman of American Century Investments, passed away on March 27, 2025, in Kansas City. Brown was known as an influential, visionary leader who managed and led the organizations for more than two decades.

Brown was entrusted with carrying forward the mission and vision of the organizations' founders, Jim and Virginia Stowers from its founding, serving in key leadership roles with unwavering dedication and foresight. His strategic guidance was instrumental in advancing the missions of these organizations, helping to drive scientific discovery and financial stewardship.

Brown served as Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Stowers Institute for Medical Research; Chair, President, and Chief Executive Officer of Stowers Resource Management, Inc.; Chair of American Century Investments; and Chair of BioMed Valley Discoveries, Inc. — roles he held until his passing.



Scott Hawley

1953 - 2025

R. Scott Hawley, Ph.D., a long-time Investigator at the Stowers Institute, passed away on January 31, 2025. He was a pioneering scientist in the field of meiosis and a cherished mentor, colleague, and friend to many.

Hawley's scientific achievements earned him widespread recognition, including election to the National Academy of Sciences and the American Academy of Arts and Sciences.

Beyond his research, Hawley was deeply passionate about training early-career scientists and was instrumental in founding the Graduate School of the Stowers Institute for Medical Research in 2012, where he served as its first Dean. He had an exceptional ability to make complex concepts accessible and exciting, fostering a deep appreciation for genetics in those he taught.

Hawley's contributions to genetics, his unwavering passion for discovery, and his commitment to training the next generation of scientists leave an enduring impact on the Stowers Institute and the scientific community at large.

William "Bill" Neaves

1943 - 2025

William "Bill" Neaves, Ph.D., founding President and CEO of the Stowers Institute, passed away on August 12, 2025. Neaves, who served these roles from 2000 to 2010, was a visionary scientist, gifted leader, and passionate advocate for scientific discovery who helped guide the Institute from its earliest days into a world-class center for biomedical research.

Neaves connection to the Institute began in the late 1990s, when he advised founders Jim and Virginia Stowers on formative strategies for its structure, organization, and operations. In partnership with the Institute's first Scientific Director Robb Krumlauf, Ph.D., Neaves established the Institute's pioneering research programs.

Under his leadership, the Institute grew from a staff of 30 to more than 500 and expanded from four Principal Investigators to 20 independent research laboratories. Neaves helped secure passage of a statewide referendum to protect scientific research and played a key role in Kansas City's emergence as a hub for health-focused biotechnology companies.

Organizational Announcements

Jonathan Thomas assumes position as Chair of Board

Following Dick Brown's passing, Jonathan Thomas, Chairman, President and CEO of American Century Investments, assumed the positions of Chair of the Board of Directors of the Stowers Institute for Medical Research as well as Chair, President, and Chief Executive Officer of Stowers Resource Management, Inc. Thomas has served as a member on these boards for many years, and more recently served under Brown as part of board governance and succession planning.

Leadership strengthened through new appointments

This year, the Institute enhanced its leadership team in recruiting a new executive leader and promoting two leaders: Chief Financial Officer and Treasurer Kristin Bechard; Chief Operating Officer Brian Slaughter, Ph.D.; and Chief Global Communications Officer Jennifer Pawlosky.

Kristin Bechard brings more than a decade of senior leadership experience from the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation, where she served as CFO and Treasurer playing a pivotal role in shaping the Foundation's long-term strategic and budgetary planning.

As CFO of the Stowers Institute, Bechard will lead long-range financial planning and the annual budgeting process, serve as a primary liaison with American Century Investments and BioMed Valley Discoveries, and oversee financial operations for the Stowers Graduate School. Her appointment reflects the Institute's continued commitment to operational excellence and world-class research through strategic financial leadership.

Brian Slaughter has dedicated nearly two decades to advancing the research programs at the Institute. His knowledge of science, operational expertise, and strategic insight have been critical to the Institute's success. As COO, he will lead the Institute's Technology Centers and operations teams, thus driving efficiency and support for Stowers scientific mission.

Jennifer Pawlosky brings more than two decades of experience in communications with independent research organizations to her role at the Institute. She joined the Institute in 2021 from the Allen Institute in Seattle, Washington, and served as Vice President of Communications and Chief of Staff for the Office of Scientific Leadership. In her new role as Vice President, Chief Global Communications Officer, Pawlosky is responsible for developing and implementing a comprehensive global communications strategy that supports the organization's mission and vision.

Scientific Honors and Awards

Stowers Investigator **Jerry Workman, Ph.D.**, a pioneer in the field of gene regulation, received one of the highest honors awarded to scientists worldwide — election to the National Academy of Sciences. Workman's research has significantly advanced our understanding of the structure and function of chromatin, the highly condensed packages of DNA and proteins. His discoveries have broad implications, including insights into diseases such as cancer.

Stowers Assistant Investigator **Kamena Kostava, Ph.D.**, was named a 2025 HHMI Freeman Hrabowski Scholar, a prestigious honor that recognizes exceptional early-career faculty with both the potential to lead in their scientific fields and build exceptional research environments. Kostova studies ribosomes — essential molecular machines inside cells that build proteins. Her lab seeks to uncover how changes in the ribosome composition regulate complex biological processes such as early development and how these changes contribute to the origination and progression of diseases such as cancer and neurodegeneration.

Riley Galton, Ph.D., a Postdoctoral Research Associate at the Stowers Institute, was awarded one of the most prestigious grants presented to early-career scientists in January. The Howard Hughes Medical Institute's Hanna Grey Fellows Program — funding support for up to eight years — is designed to bestow fellows the freedom to pursue challenging scientific questions at the forefront of their respective fields. Galton studies a phenomenon that allows many vertebrates – from sharks to mammals – to "pause" their development in response to environmental changes, sometimes for months or even years.

Stowers Postdoctoral Research Associate **Jorge Moreno, Ph.D.**, was named a 2025 Helen Hay Whitney Fellow, a prestigious three-year award that provides independent research support to early-career biomedical scientists. Focused on understanding aging, adaptation, and regeneration, Moreno studies the "immortal jellyfish," an organism with the ability to reverse its life cycle and transform from adult to juvenile in response to environmental stress.

Campus & Beyond

BIG IDEAS

BIG IDEAS, a scientific lecture series designed for the science-curious public, relaunched this past spring with guest speakers Paco Calvo, Ph.D., a philosopher of biology studying plant intelligence from the University of Murcia in Spain, and Kate Biberdorf, Ph.D., better known as "Kate the Chemist," a popular science communicator and Notre Dame's Professor for the Public Understanding of Science. The event is designed to explore innovative and thought-provoking science in an engaging and accessible manner. More than 200 members of the Kansas City community attended. Calvo, author of Planta Sapiens: The New Science of Plant Intelligence, discussed his research and challenged the audience to redefine intelligence and how organisms react to experiences. Concluding the presentation was a panel discussion hosted by Kate the Chemist between Calvo and Stowers President Alejandro Sánchez Alvarado, followed by a reception. For more information about BIG IDEAS events, visit www.stowers.org/bigideas.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Donors & Impact

Jonathan Thomas (above) and Alejandro Sánchez Alvarado (below) speaking at the American Century Championship

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Research at the Stowers Institute is rooted in the audacious vision of our founders, Jim and Virginia Stowers, and their unwavering commitment to helping people live healthier lives. As one of the largest examples of individual generosity in American history, Jim and Virginia gifted the Institute over $1 billion in American Century stock in 2001. Since then, over 40% of American Century Investments' profits, received as dividends, directly support the Stowers Institute. Additionally, donations from generous individuals and organizations help support and sustain the research at the Institute. Thanks to this support, the Stowers Institute is able to commit to an unprecedented research focus on asking and answering the big, bold question of biology, accelerating our understanding of what makes humans healthy and what goes wrong in disease.

Depths of Color, Ayantika Sen Gupta, winner of scientific art competition. Confocal microscopy image showing human breast cells growing in a 3D environment.

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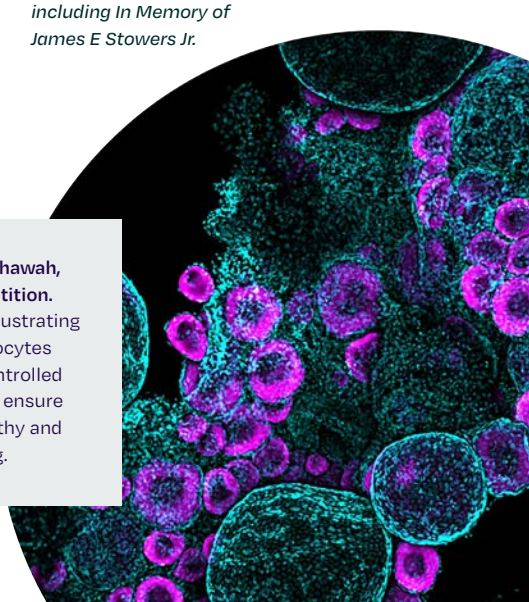

Shaping the Future, Gopal Kushawah, winner of scientific art competition. Confocal microscopy image illustrating the maturation of zebrafish oocytes (egg cells) relies on tightly controlled gene expression patterns that ensure the mature eggs become healthy and capable of producing offspring.

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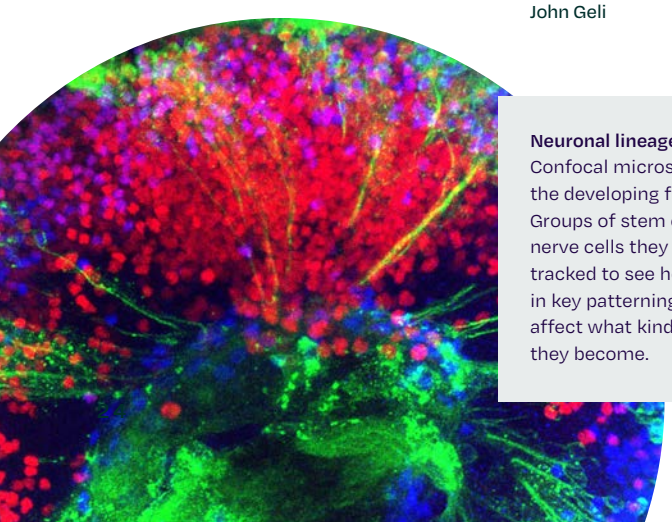

Neuronal lineage, Rose Coyne. Confocal microscopy image of the developing fruit fly brain. Groups of stem cells and the nerve cells they produce were tracked to see how changes in key patterning signals affect what kinds of neurons they become.

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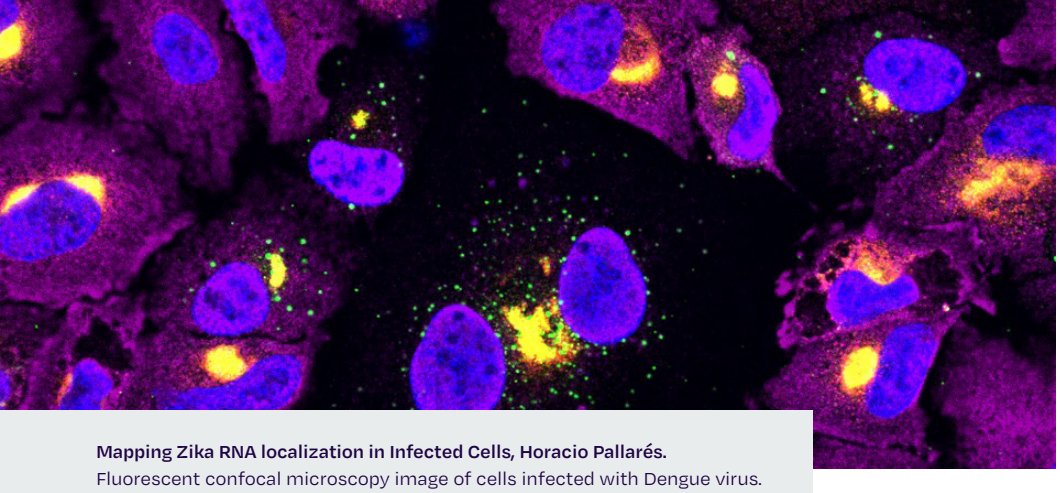

Mapping Zika RNA localization in Infected Cells, Horacio Pallarés.
Fluorescent confocal microscopy image of cells infected with Dengue virus.

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Roger Zakheim

Jon Zindel

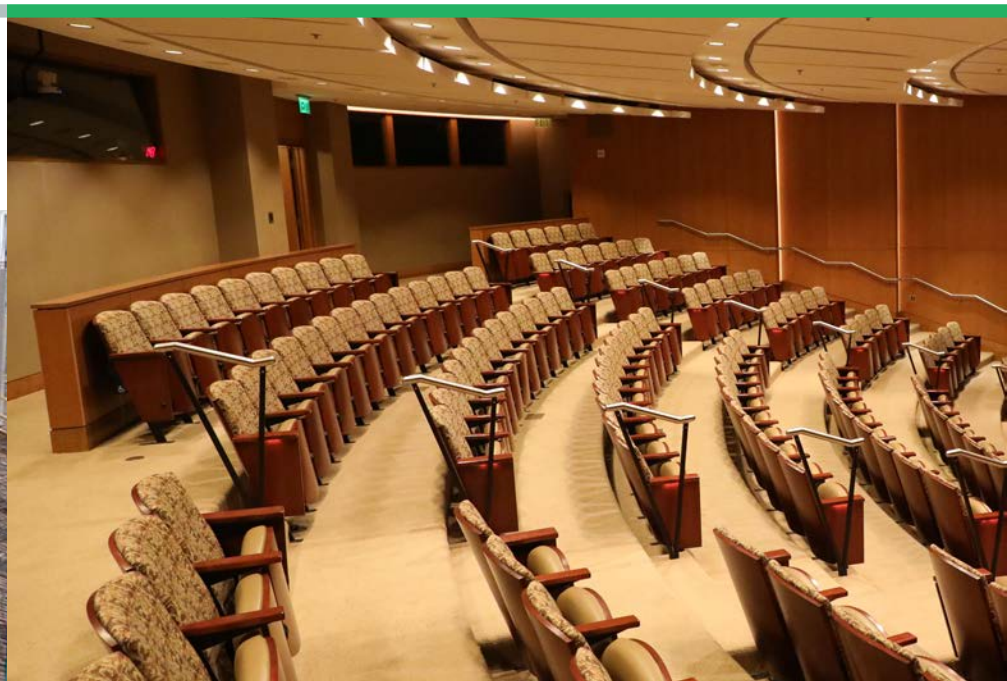
Behind the Science

Then and Now

CELEBRATING 25 YEARS

Stowers science has thrived and continues to do so in large part due to the generosity and vision of our founders, Jim and Virginia Stowers. Not only did they endow the majority of their fortune toward building a world-class biomedical research institution, Jim and Virginia ensured that their gift would endure far into the future.

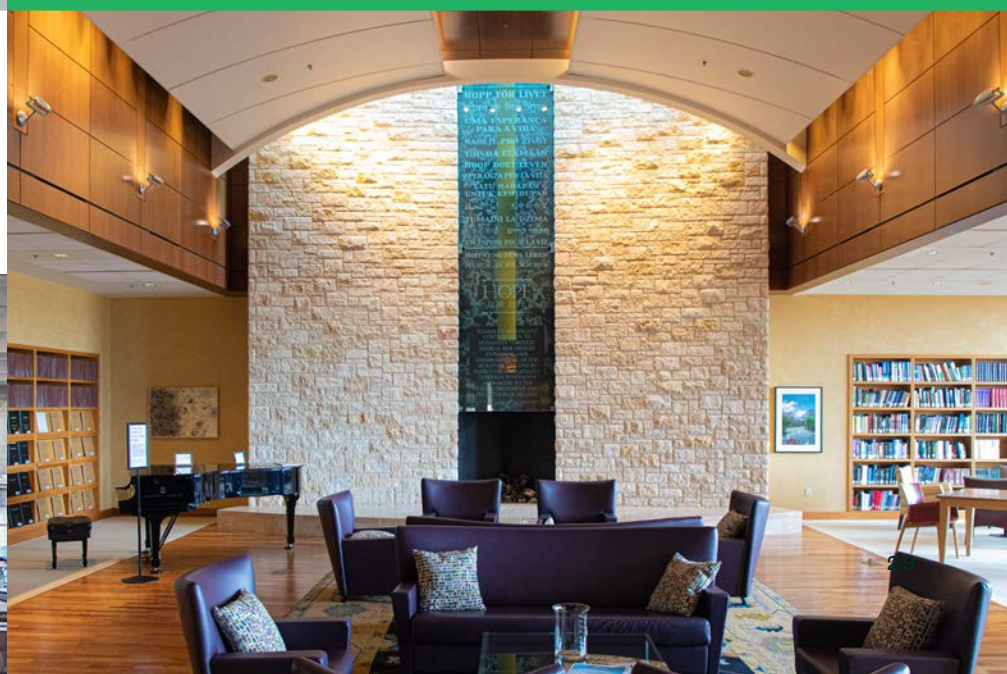
From a construction site to a 200-seat auditorium, this space has become the heart of our campus gatherings.



The fountain has become an iconic symbol of the Institute, greeting guests and members as they arrive each day.

The Gallery is one of the most dynamic spaces on campus, filled with natural light and open design. It serves as a central hub for poster sessions during conferences, community celebrations, and informal gatherings.

Stocked with an extensive collection of scientific journals, books, and thesis dissertations, the Library supports the daily work of scientists while offering a collaborative environment for study, discussion, and reflection during conferences, community celebrations, and informal gatherings.



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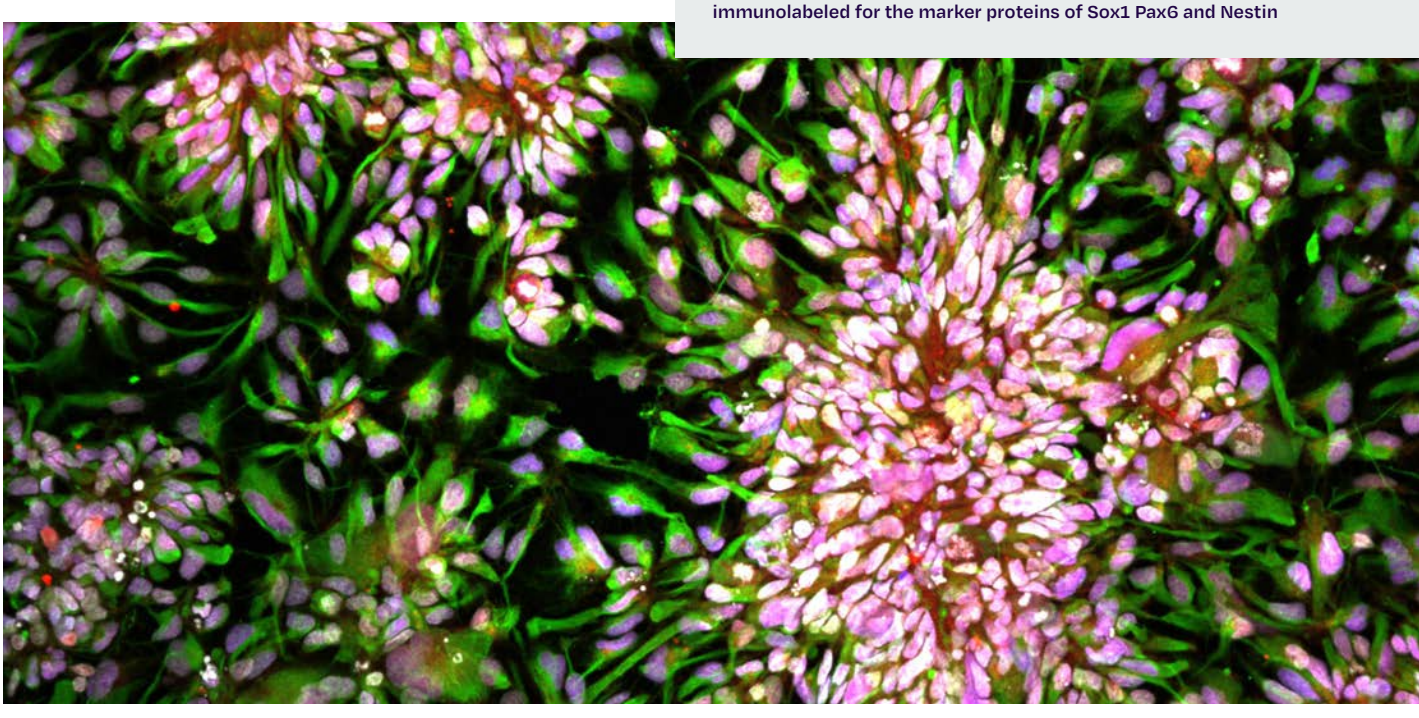

Neural progenitors differentiated from hiPSCs, stained with DAPI and immunolabeled for the marker proteins of Sox1 PaxG and Nestin

Our Mission

To make a significant contribution to humanity through medical research by expanding our understanding of the secrets of life and by improving life's quality through innovative approaches to the causes, treatment, and prevention of diseases.

FSC