

2004

Fourth Annual Symposium in Virology

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Fourth Annual Symposium in Virology
Opening Remarks
October 8, 2004
John C. Owens
NU Vice President and IANR Harlan Vice Chancellor

What a pleasure it is to take part in "welcoming-you" to this Fourth Annual Symposium in Virology. Such a "tremendous - program" lies ahead! And how pleased and proud we are that this year's symposium is a "special-tribute" to our colleague Dr. James Van Etten, Professor of Plant Pathology in our Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources here at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, who "last-year" was elected to membership in the National Academy of Sciences.

~~As Vice Chancellor of the Institute,~~ I'm going to speak briefly today of "virology-work" Jim and other members of the Institute faculty are involved with. It's extremely exciting work, with tremendous potential for our state and, indeed, our world.

For instance:

One of our researchers has helped and is helping eradicate

two major infectious-swine-diseases: pseudo rabies in the 1990s and, currently, Porcine Reproductive-Respiratory-Syndrome Virus, or PRRS. His molecular test for "pseudo-rabies" detects the virus in the animal's brain and is much more specific and rapid than is blood testing. This work makes Nebraska a national reference-point in the nationwide-campaign to eradicate pseudo rabies.

Since PRRS "now" is the most economically significant infectious disease of swine, he and another of our Institute researchers have collaborated to develop an "infectious-clone" of the "PRRS virus" to explore methods expected to lead to new and extremely-effective PRRS vaccinations. Their work has the potential to develop safer, stronger vaccines and to help eliminate the PRRS virus, exciting to USDA as well as to all of us.

Most of the work of another Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources "scientist" has been with a cattle-herpes-virus called bovine-herpes-virus 1, or BHV-1. One of the causative agents of "shipping-fever", BHV-1 also causes conjunctivitis, nasal congestion, and upper-respiratory-infections. About five years

ago this researcher also began working with a human herpes virus, herpes-simplex-type-1, which causes recurrent eye disease, encephalitis, and cold sores.

One of our scientists^{''} researches^{''} HIV and human herpes virus transmission. He specifically researches the routes and factors associated with the transmission of these viruses from mothers to children in Africa. His research subsequently could contribute to designing^{''} strategies^{''} to prevent infection.

And then, of course, there is^{''} the work^{''} of Dr. Van Etten, whom we honor today and whom I consider it a real privilege to know and to work with at the University of Nebraska.

Dr. Van Etten has been involved in the discovery and initial characterization of the prototype-member of two^{''} of the approximately 60 known-families-of-viruses. The first is bacteriophage phi 6, and the second, PBCV-1 (*Paramecium bursaria* chlorella-virus). The discovery of these two viruses clearly increased our knowledge about the diversity^{''} of viruses. Furthermore, studies on these viruses continue to produce

“unexpected-rewards,” including discoveries in biochemistry, in molecular biology, in evolution, and in ecology.

Here at the university, Dr. Van Etten is our William Allington Distinguished Professor of Plant Pathology, and winner of the Outstanding Research and Creative Activity Award, the highest research award given at Nebraska. In 2003, he was “elected” to the National Academy of Sciences. Jim has several other titles also: Professor. Colleague. Mentor. Friend.

If you visit Dr. Van Etten’s laboratory, you’ll see “lab-coats” of former students hanging there – coats that date back to 1969, and which have certain characteristics about the students written directly on them. When Dr. Van Etten ran out of wall space on which to “retire” former students’ lab coats, he began hanging their photos, instead.

I don’t know about you, but I’d feel pretty good as a student to know that a “scientist” of Dr. Van Etten’s caliber decided to hang “my” picture in his laboratory.

At any one time you’ll find several undergrads, graduate students, postdoctoral researchers, visiting scholars, and

technicians 'working' in Dr. Van Etten's laboratory. He includes undergrads so they can be exposed to research and have a hands-on opportunity to learn. And learn they do.

Besides his work with colleagues here in Nebraska, Jim Van Etten's 'discoveries' have led to international research - collaborations involving about 20 laboratories in the United States, Europe, and Japan.

We are tremendously proud of him, and also tremendously proud of the fact that all five Nebraska faculty members ~~selected~~ *who have been*

MEMBERS OF the National Academy of Sciences, the National Academy of Engineering, and the National Institute of Medicine have had their faculty appointments in the Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources. What a 'great demonstration' of the talent and dedication of our faculty and the strength of IANR programs! We celebrate each of these 'tremendous scientists', and today we especially honor Dr. Van Etten for his outstanding contributions to science, our state, and our world.

While I have spoken of the 'virology-work' occurring within the Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources, I must add

that at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln we are very, very proud of the work occurring in virology today throughout our campus and the other campuses that combine expertise-and-facilities of the leading biomedical-research-institutions in the state into the Nebraska Center for Virology. Much, much exciting work is occurring in Nebraska!

9-weeks

Before I close, I want to especially thank University of Nebraska President Emeritus Dennis-Smith both for providing sponsorship for today's symposium, and for his years of inspirational leadership here at the university as a strong-supporter of research and scholarly activity. His Scientific - Freedom-and-Responsibility Award from the American Association for the Advancement of Science is very much deserved.

Again, it is such a pleasure to have you with us today, and to be here with you. I hope you relish the day!

Thank you.