News in Brief

Eric Kandel Leads New Brain Science Institute at CUMC

The Kavli Foundation has announced a $7.5 million award to establish the Kavli Institute for Brain Science at Columbia University Medical Center under the leadership of University Professor and Nobel laureate Eric Kandel. The new institute will focus on the development of strategies for analyzing and deciphering how signaling in neural circuits controls behavior. “Our work will be directed toward developing more powerful tools to enable us to move from the study of individual nerve cells to that of complex neural systems which underlie the higher mental function,” Kandel said.

Larry Dais Receives Humanitarian Award

Larry Dais, assistant vice president of Columbia’s Office of Government Relations and Community Affairs, recently received a Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Humanitarian Award from New York Gov. George Pataki. He was cited for his “strong commitment to public service and improving the economic health of Harlem.” Gov. Pataki had previously appointed Dais as vice-chair of the Harlem Community Development Corp.

SOA Student Chosen for Chesterfield Writing Project

Sandi Groff, SOA’03, is spending the summer in Los Angeles as part of the Chesterfield Writer’s Film Project (WFP). A playwright, Groff joins five other writers in the program. Each will create two original, feature-length screenplays. Groff has been paired with writing mentor Sam Harper, who scripted Cheaper by the Dozen, and executive mentor Pam Abdy, former head of Danny DeVito’s production company. At the end of the year, WFP writers will be introduced to literary agents and agencies. Recently, 15 films by WFP alumni have been produced, including A Walk to Remember and Free Willy 2.

Peadiatric Asthma Poses Threat

Close to half of all children coming into the New York City homeless shelter system have asthma, according to a report in the March issue of The Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine, whose authors include Columbia’s Diane McLean, Department of Psychiatry, and Irwin Redlener, associate dean at the Mailman School of Public Health. Some 740 children in three New York City shelters participated in the study, which comes at a time when asthma is on the rise nationally. Children in poorer, urban areas are more likely to suffer from the disease because of the higher number of such lung irritants as mold, dust and cockroach feces in their environment. Also, the majority of children with severe asthma were not taking the anti-inflammatory medication needed to control it. The report will help researchers better understand how to develop successful remedies to this illness.

Quotable Columbian

“…in an interview with London’s The Independent previewing his BBC4 documentary Historians of Genius, University Professor Simon Schama declared that something was missing from most current-day history writing – life. After lauding the efforts of such historians as Edward Gibbon, Lord Macaulay and Thomas Carlyle, on whom the program is based, Schama said, “History’s adventure has become a bit lost. It’s not as explosive as it used to be. We need to recapture that…We need to restore the physical, real, temporal narrative history which was never entirely lost.” It was just concealed by the juggernaut of academic history which seemed to dictate how and to whom you write.”