The 2004 Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine was awarded on Monday Oct. 4 to Richard Axel, University Professor of Biochemistry and Molecular Biophysics and Pathology; and Axel's former postdoctoral researcher Linda Buck of the Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center in Seattle.

The two were recognized for their work elucidating how mammals can detect and distinguish among a bewildering array of different odors, from the sweet smell of lilacs in the spring to the not-so-sweet aroma of rotting food. ‘I am deeply honored and very pleased,’ Axel says. ‘This honor represents the long efforts of many faculty, students and fellows who have worked within our laboratories at Columbia University Medical Center.’

‘I owe Columbia an enormous debt, first for providing me with a scholarship to attend the College, and later for providing a rich intellectual environment in which to do this work,’ said Axel. ‘I’ve spent my entire career here in New York at Columbia. I think the award honors both the University and the city.’

Columbia hosts a flurry of events for voter registration.

Symposium Explores How to Humanize 21st Century City

By Caroline Luedtke

A final symposium presented for Columbia’s 250th anniversary celebration brought together leading practitioners of architecture, law, ethics, political science, anthropology and sociology to explore ‘The 21st Century City and its Values: Urbanism, Toleration and Equality.’ Among the topics discussed was the proliferation and diversity of development efforts underway in the Asia Pacific Rim, which has been a hotbed of explosive growth.

China has 166 cities with more than 1 million people, compared to 9 in the United States, according to panelists. The explosive growth of megacities threatens housing, clean water and air, among other things. Moderator and Professor Hilary Burton, who co-chaired the conference with his Katzman Ring Professor of Political Science and History, posed questions such as: How do we cope with what are some models for planning and how can we humanize super-density?

Yung Ho Chang, an architect in China and former director of the Graduate Center of Architecture at Peking University, said the growth in China is so rapid that what might take two to three months to design at an American firm could be designed in as little as seven days in China. The building schedule is rapid as well.

If buildings go up too fast, ‘instant cities’ emerge. Chang called the current trend of constructing instant cities ‘very dangerous.’ When structures are built so fast, he said, they fail to accommodate the problems related to growth and evolution of the city in the future. Instead, Chang described severe- al of his design projects that incorporate a slower method, taking into account environmental and other factors.

One of his projects is to design a plan for the Liusha Peninsula, part of Nanning—a city of 7 million people. The peninsula has been scarred by excessive bulldozing and

continued on page 7

Richard Axel wins Nobel Prize

By Susan Conove

In a press conference at Columbia University Medical Center (CUMC), President Lee C. Bollinger said that universities value creativity, ‘so when a Nobel Prize is conferred we take it as a validation of a value we hold core to our professional lives. Richard Axel is a person of great warmth and loyalty to Columbia. Today is a day we reciprocate that and also offer our congratulations.’

Axel and Buck’s discoveries go beyond providing an understanding of what most people think is merely an aesthetic sense. Understanding how the brain processes smell begins to let scientists understand how the brain works in general. ‘Odors generate specific behaviors and specific thoughts and how that happens is still an unsolved and fascinating mystery in brain science,’ Axel says. Any medical applications that come from their discoveries, Axel adds, will probably have been generated from this basic understanding of how the brain functions.

Gerald Fischbach, executive vice president and for Health and Biomedical Sciences and dean of the Faculty of Medicine, said the work, ‘began from this basic understanding of how the brain functions.’

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continued on page 6

Hundreds Honor John W. Kluge and Kluge Scholars Program

By Alex Sacks

The Kluge Scholars Program for intercultural and international leadership, which offers financial aid and special programming, has helped nearly 500 Columbia College students since 1987 and enriched their experience on Morningside Heights. On Friday, Oct. 1, Columbia celebrated the program and the 90th birthday of its benefactor, John W. Kluge, CC’37, with a black tie dinner in Low Library Rotunda.

‘I’d rather by far invest in people than buildings,’ said Kluge. ‘If I can infuse a mind to improve itself, that’ll pass on to their children and to their children’s children.’

More than 500 people—current and former Kluge Scholars, faculty, alumni, administrators and friends—were on hand to honor Kluge, who attended Columbia on scholarship. He became one of this country’s most successful entrepreneurs and has generously chosen to give back to his alma mater so others might follow in his footsteps.

‘If it hadn’t been for Columbia, my path in life would have been completely different,’ Kluge told those assembled. ‘Columbia gave me an opportunity and you scholars are being given that opportunity as well. The best thing I can do is to do something for other people that other people have done for me.

continued on page 6

Kluge Scholars Regional Goaslett, CC’06, and Jessica Perez, LC’06, present John Kluge with the traditional banner of his class. Credit: Eileen Barroso

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY IN THE CITY OF NEW YORK

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