

Canada's innovation proposals build up head of steam

Toronto The Canada Foundation for Innovation, the agency set up in 1997 to help to revive the country's research infrastructure, has announced the 280 recipients of its latest round of awards, totalling Can\$779 million (US\$490 million).

The foundation plans to invest Can\$3.15 billion in university buildings and equipment by 2010, and last week's announcement takes it halfway to meeting that goal. The awards, announced on 30 January, totalled about twice as much as in previous rounds. "We had a very rigorous review process, but we also had really good proposals so we figured we should go for it," says David Strangway, president of the foundation. But Strangway warned that the spending spree will leave the foundation with less in the bank for future rounds.

♦ www.innovation.ca

Few want to be a millionaire as prize chances go begging

Munich Wunderkind scientists from all over the world appear to have missed the chance to apply for a generous funding award. The 29 winners of the German Sofja Kovalevskaja Prize received their awards last week, but the organizers admitted that only 109 researchers applied, giving each applicant a better than one in four chance of landing 1.2 million euros (US\$1 million) in funding.

The one-off prize, named after a Russian mathematician, is designed to encourage foreign researchers to work in Germany (see *Nature* 409, 652; 2001). It is administered by the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation using a government fund generated by the sale of mobile-phone licences in 2000.

Many young scientists may have been unaware of the awards because of the limited time the government gave for the scheme's administration.

No alcoholics, please, we're in space

Washington Liars and habitual drinkers are not welcome on the International Space Station, say guidelines released last week.

The agreement between the US, European, Russian, Canadian and Japanese space agencies outlines conditions that must be met by space tourists, or any other visitors to the station who are not professional astronauts. Amateur astronauts, such as Mark Shuttleworth, the South African Internet millionaire who is due to visit the station this April, must be physically fit, able to cope under stress and have good interpersonal and communication skills.



Fit to fly: future 'space tourist' Mark Shuttleworth needs to cope under stress.

Disqualification criteria were also stated. Delinquency, criminal behaviour, drug addiction or habitual drunkenness will each be grounds for refusing entry to the station. Persons indulging in "notoriously disgraceful conduct" will also be barred, although there were no examples of who might fall into this category.

♦ www.nasa.gov/hqpaio/isscrewcriteria.pdf

Centre set to target genes behind depression

Munich Germany's Max Plank Society has signalled a new willingness to collaborate with industry by agreeing to host a new genotyping centre at its Munich-based institutes for psychiatry and biochemistry.

In an agreement signed on 4 February, GlaxoSmithKline committed to support the infrastructure and staff of the new Genetic Research Centre, and the Bavarian government pledged 4 million euros (US\$3.5 million) over the next four years for research.

The centre will generate clinical, genomic and functional data in an attempt to identify genes associated with complex disease. This work will include a study of 1,000 individuals with unipolar depression.

FBI goes electronic in anthrax inquiry

Washington The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) has asked 30,000 microbiologists for help in its anthrax investigation. The bureau's plea came in an e-mail sent to the American Society for Microbiology (ASM). After consulting with its lawyers, the society forwarded the message to its entire US membership.

The message says that whoever mailed the anthrax spores to two news outlets and two senators last October is likely to be a "stand-offish" person with access to a laboratory.

"Whoever is responsible for the attacks has to have some scientific knowledge, and the ASM's members will have insights that might be able to help us," says Van Harp, assistant director of the bureau's Washington regional office. Harp would not say whether the FBI had received any responses.

♦ www.asmsa.org/pcsrc/fbirequest.htm

Virologists struck down by virus at virology meeting

London Virology researchers attending a conference suffered a nasty experience after unwittingly taking their work home with them.

Some 40 delegates went down with vomiting, diarrhoea and fever in the days following last September's meeting of the European Society for Clinical Virology held in Lahti, Finland. The offender was quickly identified as a Norwalk-like virus, a common cause of such outbreaks. This was an example of a food- and water-borne infection — the very subject of the conference session at which the virus struck.

The exact source proved harder to pinpoint. "It was a buffet, and people were picking here and there," says Carl-Henrik von Bonsdorff, a virologist at the University of Helsinki. "But the most probable source was the salad." Von Bonsdorff reported the results of an investigation into the outbreak at another, so far incident-free, society meeting in London last month.

X marks the spot for Stanford geneticist

San Diego Bio-X, the interdisciplinary research facility being developed at Stanford University in California, has appointed developmental biologist Matthew Scott as its chairman.

Scott, who is already based at Stanford, is perhaps best known for his 1983 co-discovery of the homeobox, a family of genes that plays a crucial role in the development of the body plan of many animals. He started his five-year term at Bio-X on 1 January.

Bio-X aims to bring together engineers, biologists, medical researchers and physical scientists to develop new medical technologies. Scheduled for completion in June 2003, the centre was made possible largely by a US\$150-million pledge from Silicon Valley entrepreneur James Clark. An anonymous donor also gave \$60 million. But last year, Clark suspended \$60 million of his pledge as a protest against President George W. Bush's policies on stem-cell research, and one of Scott's challenges will be raise that money from elsewhere.

♦ cmgm.stanford.edu/biochem/biox



Model of the future: Stanford's Bio-X facility.