

Pioneer gene-splicer David V. Goeddel named UCSD Outstanding Alumnus of the Year

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PIONEER GENE-SPLICER NAMED UCSD OUTSTANDING ALUMNUS OF THE YEAR

David V. Goeddel, a pioneer gene-splicer and one of the founders of biotech giant Genentech, Inc., has been named the 1996 Outstanding Alumnus of the Year at the University of California, San Diego.

Goeddel will receive his award June 15 at a gala at Geisel Library on the UCSD campus.

Known for his hard-driving work habits who regularly puts in 80- to 90-hour weeks in the lab or office, Goeddel was recruited to Genentech as the startup's first full-time employee and senior scientist. In less than five years, he succeeded in cloning five major drugs that catapulted Genentech into the national gene-splicing spotlight.

His list of cloned drugs included human insulin; human growth hormone; the anti-clotting agent, tissue plasminogen activator (TPA); alpha interferon, which is helping to combat cancer and hepatitis; and gamma interferon, used to fight a rare and lethal childhood immune deficiency disease.

Described by colleagues as a "kamikaze scientist" who works a blistering night-and-day schedule with a single-minded purpose, Goeddel accomplished all this before he reached the age of 30.

Goeddel remained with Genentech till 1993, when he joined a young biotech venture called Tularik, Inc., which he helped launch two years earlier with friends Steven McKnight, of the Carnegie Institute, and Robert Tijan, of the University of California, Berkeley. Instead of focusing on protein-based drugs--the mission of Genentech--the new firm embarked on a different path: transcription factors, nonprotein switches that turn genes on and off. The idea was to create drugs capable of blocking the activity of these chemical switches in harmful cells before they had a chance to cause disease.

Today, Goeddel serves as president and vice president for research at Tularik, named for an Alaska river. The firm, with about 100 employees, has recently developed a candidate drug that has shown potential in animal studies for lowering cholesterol.

A native of Poway, Goeddel attended the Revelle College at UCSD from 1968 to 1972. After receiving his undergraduate degree in chemistry, he attended the University of Colorado at Boulder, where he received his Ph.D. in biochemistry. He then moved back to the West Coast and the Stanford Research Institute; a year later, he was hired by Genentech.

Goeddel was elected to the National Academy of Sciences at age 42, becoming the first UCSD undergraduate alumnus to be so honored. His other honors include the Eli Lilly Award in Biological Chemistry and the Scheele Medal from the Swedish Academy of Pharmaceutical Sciences. He also was elected a fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, and the Academy of Arts and Sciences.

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