

Bioscience Institutions Come Together to Launch Microlife Discovery Center for Area Students

Center Aims to Inspire the Next Generation of Scientists by Engaging Students in the Discovery of New Microbial Life Forms

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Microbes may hold the key to many of the challenges we face today, such as renewable energy and disease eradication, and yet scientists estimate that they have discovered less than one percent of all microbial species.

Helping students delve into such uncharted scientific territory as a means of heightening their interest and motivation in science and research is the purpose of the Microlife Discovery Center. The Center, to be launched later this month, uses a novel approach to combine San Diego's cutting-edge biotechnology with UCSD's BioBridge science outreach capabilities, giving access to local teachers and students.

The Microlife Discovery Center, developed from a program pioneered by Dr. Jay Short while at the E.O. Wilson Biodiversity Foundation, aims to motivate and inspire the next generation of scientists and science advocates by engaging students from the San Diego region and beyond, in a hands-on process - the MicroBlitzSM -- to discover and describe new microbial life forms.

Through its local partnership with BioBridge (a well-established science education and outreach program at the University of California, San Diego), the Center will teach area students the process of searching for, isolating and identifying microbes in various environments, in addition to studying microbes in laboratory conditions.

The launching of the Microlife Discovery Center -- whose operations will be housed initially at a laboratory facility at BioAtla, a leading protein engineering and evolution company headquartered in San Diego -- was made possible by kind donations from Life Technologies Corporation -- based in Carlsbad, California -- and the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation - based in Kansas City Missouri. Additional matching contributions were made by Pro-Natura USA, BioAtla LLC, and UCSD's BioBridge science education and outreach program.

The MicroBlitzSM program will be piloted this year with schools from the Sweetwater Union High School District, and the Oceanside Unified School District in San Diego County. Plans are also underway to extend the pilot to Kansas City Missouri. Eventually, the full program will be made available on a national and international level.

Says Martyn Collins, Ph.D., Executive Director of the Microlife Discovery Center: "The Center is a perfect example of what can happen when the bioscience and research communities join forces with local school systems such as the Sweetwater and Oceanside districts for the betterment of students' science education and career development."

Jeremy Babendure, Ph.D., Director of UCSD's BioBridge program, agrees: "As school districts face increased budget cuts, the Microlife Discovery Center synergizes what BioBridge can do to excite students about science and related careers, and to bridge gaps in science education faced by secondary schools."

"I believe that the new Center provides a powerful opportunity for fostering early interest in science by enabling students to experience first-hand the excitement of discovery," notes Dr. Jay Short, Ph.D., Chairman, CEO and Principal of BioAtla. "The discoveries and innovations made by scientists are key for addressing the myriad of challenges we are facing today and will face tomorrow," he says.

Members of the public will get the chance to experience the excitement of the Center's MicroBlitzSM activities by attending the San Diego Science Festival Expo in Balboa Park on Saturday, April 4. That day, the Microlife Discovery Center will be sponsoring a competition for all comers, to discover and name new species of microbes discovered in Balboa Park.

In the first public Microbial Bioblitz event (sponsored by the E.O. Wilson Biodiversity Foundation), more than 200 novel species of microbes were found in New York's Central Park.

Students who participate in the school-based program stand an excellent chance of making their own discoveries and of becoming scientific authors before they graduate high school, the Center reports.

About the Center's Sponsors

Pro-Natura USA is part of the Pro-Natura International network, an award winning non-profit organization dedicated to poverty alleviation, biodiversity conservation and the avoidance of climate change.

The E. O. Wilson Biodiversity Foundation aims to preserve biological diversity in the living environment by inventing and implementing business and educational strategies in the service of conservation.

BioAtla LLC. is a global, protein engineering and evolution company, based in San Diego, offering research and development services to customers.

The Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation helps individuals attain economic independence by advancing educational achievement and entrepreneurial success.

Life Technologies Corporation (NASDAQ:LIFE) is a global biotechnology tools company dedicated to improving the human condition. Its systems, consumables and services enable researchers to accelerate scientific exploration, driving to discoveries and developments that make life even better.

UCSD BioBridge is a science education and outreach initiative launched under the direction of UCSD Nobel Laureate Roger Tsien in conjunction with UCSD Student Educational Advancement. BioBridge was created to bring the excitement of scientific and laboratory discovery directly into secondary school classrooms, thereby enhancing science instruction and teacher professional development while empowering the next generation of potential scientists.

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