

Progress on the VRRF Diabetic/VEGF Retinal Project Kenneth P. Mitton, Ph.D.

This project was initiated with the simple desire to establish a diabetic rat model that would provide VEGF-driven vascular changes, possibly inflammatory, that could be used for both mechanistic study and intervention testing in the PRRL Lab. The two experimental models have begun to yield some interesting discoveries. Results from the first experiments of VEGF-165 isoforms have yielded the most data so far, sufficient for a recent NIH R15 grant submission that received an excellent score.

New Member to the Board of Directors

Vision Research ROPARD Foundation welcomes Kelli Matthew to its Board of Directors. Kelli is Director of Strategic Initiatives at the law firm, Clark Hill P.C.

2015 S.U.P.E.R. Students Fifteenth Annual Symposium, July 31, 2015

Caroline Cencer, Jonathan Cheon, Naveena Daram, Joshua Hohlbein, Nicole Roussey, Quentin Tompkins and Natalia Wardia, seven biomedical science students, took part in the S.U.P.E.R Student Program (Summer Undergraduate Program in Eye Research) at the Eye Research Institute, at Oakland University. On July 31st, on the completion of the summer program, each presented a paper on the research that they had carried out over the previous 13 weeks. In addition to their mentors, the event was attended by proud family and friends.

Natalie Wardia and Joshua Hohlbein presented their research on Pediatric Eye Disease at Sigma XI Student Research Conference in Kansas City, Missouri.

Five students presented their research at a meeting of Michigan Microscopy and Microanalysis Society at Oakland University. Nathan Spix gave a talk on ROP. Poster presentations were made by: Joshua Hohlbein (ROP), Caroline Cencer (UVB-induced cataract), Brandon Metcalf (OCT) and Quentin Tompkins (Focal ERG) made poster presentations.

Holiday Giving

Vision Research ROPARD Foundation is funded almost entirely by private donations. The funds are used to support retinal research in children and adults, the Children's Low Vision Resource Center and education through the S.U.P.E.R Students program at the Eye Research Institute at Oakland University. As the Holiday Season approaches, we would ask that you consider supporting VRRF with a gift to continue our mission.

Follow VRRF on Facebook and Twitter and learn about resources at Pinterest.com/VRRF.

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A Letter from the Directors

Dear Friends,

Over the past year, we at Vision Research ROPARD Foundation have worked to fulfill our mission—to fund research, programs and services designed to prevent and/or treat retinal diseases in all ages. During 2015, we have done this by supporting research for several retinal diseases including new drug therapy for Familial Exudative Vitreoretinopathy (FEVR). Progress has also been made on the VRRF Diabetic/VEGF Project and ongoing research at the PRRL Lab. Grant applications to fund retinal research have been received and approved.

As you know, we also fund educational programs and services which include the S.U.P.E.R. Students program at the Eye Research Institute at Oakland University and the Children's Low Vision Resource Center in Royal Oak, Michigan. In this newsletter, we join Zahari Weal and his family when they visit with Paula Korelitz at the Center. Both of these endeavors continue to draw interest and community support.

Donors and volunteers are important to our success. In this newsletter, we feature several events that have occurred in the last few months, run by remarkable volunteers. We will meet Ben Conti, a 13-year-old from Birmingham, Michigan who held the 20/20 Tourney, a tennis tournament for budding tennis players. And we have news of golf outings in Ohio and Texas.

Thank you for your support and we wish you all a wonderful holiday season and successful New Year.

Very truly yours,

Michael T. Trese, MD
Co-Medical Director

Antonio Capone, Jr., MD
Co-Medical Director

Keep Your Eye on the Ball!

Vision Research ROPARD Foundation
Presents
Golf Outing and Silent Auction

September 2016

Date and Location to be Determined



Zahari Visits the Children's Low Vision Resource Center

One year ago, we wrote about Zahari Weal, an 8-year old Bulgarian boy with Stage 5 Retinopathy of Prematurity who was adopted by the Weal family of Kalamazoo, Michigan. Zahari came to the United States, a frightened, malnourished little boy who had been living in an orphanage. He has come a long way with his new family. Today, he weighs more than twice his original weight and has grown almost a foot taller. He enjoys swimming and plays kick ball at school.

Recently, Zahari, with his mother, Courtney and his sister, Hannah visited the Children's Low Vision Resource Center in Royal Oak MI, where they spent time with VRRF's Outreach Director, Paula Korelitz. Paula assessed Zahari's needs so that she could help the family facilitate his development. Although he does not speak, it is obvious that Zahari is quite smart. He follows verbal commands well and has figured out that clicking his tongue helps him understand and navigate his environment through echolocation. He responds to music with enjoyment and laughter and communicates well with his family.

Paula discussed Courtney's concerns and how to address them. Zahari has been placed in a special needs class at school, which Courtney feels does not provide the stimulation that he needs. Paula explained the philosophy of Active Learning in which an adult provides a developmentally appropriate, enticing environment for the child and the child learns through self exploration. Such an environment would be beneficial for Zahari. During his visit, Paula and Zahari investigated every inch of the Center. Many toys and material were familiar to him but



From left: Paula Korelitz, Zahari, Courtney Weal exploring the Resource Center



Zahari playing with toys

much was new. Courtney was given materials and books to help with his development and she was also given Paula's number if she needs advice in the future.

Zahari has had a profound effect on the Weal family. Living with Zahari has led Courtney to consider a career change. She would like to become a Teacher of the Visually Impaired so she can help other children in similar situations.

VRRF Benefits from Fundraisers

SKiHi Enterprises Annual Benefit Golf Tournament

Kelsi Skipper, granddaughter of Richard and Jackie Skipper, is the inspiration behind this Golf Tournament. Kelsi was born prematurely and has ROP. For more than ten years, the Tournament which takes place in Fort Worth, Texas, has raised funds to support VRRF, Cook Children's Medical Center, The Child Study Center and other children's charities to benefit children like Kelsi. It has generated more than \$500,000 in donations.

Trinity Rose Golf Outing

Ten years ago when Stacy and Rich Bonitz learned that their youngest child, Trinity Rose had Familial Exudative Vitreoretinopathy (FEVR) a disease that would leave her blind, they decided to help Trinity Rose and other children in the same situation. They set up the Trinity Rose Foundation. The aim of the Foundation is to provide financial aid, fund medical research to find a cure and provide education resources and opportunities to families with children with vision issues. The Golf Outing took place on September 21st in Medina, Ohio.

Ben Conti and The 20/20 Tennis Tourney

Ben Conti is a typical active 13-year-old who loves sports, especially tennis and hockey, games that he plays well. But not so typically, he was born with vision threatening eye conditions including congenital cataracts and a retinal abnormality called persistent fetal vasculature syndrome. As a result, between the ages 4 and 9, he had three eye operations. Surgeries that were followed with years of orthoptic treatment.

These experiences have led Ben, although young, to appreciate his vision and to realize that many children born with eye conditions may not have such a great recovery. He understands that children who

live with low or no vision can benefit from research and treatment to correct their eye conditions. Two years ago, he had an idea to hold an event to raise funds to help these children. Such an event would raise money, awareness and would involve children. Thus the 20/20 Tennis Tourney came about. Ben and his parents, Katie and Chris searched out an organization which could use these funds to cure childhood eye disease. Vision Research ROPARD Foundation was the worthy beneficiary of Ben's idea.

The 20/20 Tennis Tourney took place on August 30th, in Bloomfield Hills, Michigan. Forty youngsters, ages 9 to 14 took part in the tourney. The participants were divided into four

teams which took part in four events, including Ping Pong Tennis, Tennis Trivia, Tennis at four different stations and an Elimination Round. The afternoon ended with a raffle for many interesting items and an exciting pro-exhibition play down (pros from several area tennis clubs attended). The Orange Team (Team French Open) was the afternoon winner, and everyone came away with prizes, including Vision Research ROPARD Foundation which received a generous check from the event.

Thank you Ben for having such a great idea, and thanks for the hard work of you and your parents, Katie and Chris, and everyone else who made the event a resounding success.



Service Speed Competition



From left: Dr. Antonio Capone, Jr., Katie Conti, Ben Conti, Chris Conti