Jean Bennett, MD, PhD, Wins 2012 Bressler Prize in Vision Science

One of the foremost specialists in the study of the molecular genetics of retinal degenerations as well as in the development and application of gene therapy treatment for those same ocular diseases, Jean Bennett, MD, PhD, has been awarded The Jewish Guild for the Blind’s 2012 Alfred W. Bressler Prize in Vision Science.

Dr. Bennett is the F.M. Kirby Professor of Ophthalmology and Cell and Developmental Biology as well as a Senior Investigator in the F. M. Kirby Center for Molecular Ophthalmology at the Perelman School of Medicine, University of Pennsylvania. Dr. Bennett joined the staff of the Scheie Eye Institute at the Perelman School of Medicine in 1992. She also conducts research at the Center for Cellular and Molecular Therapeutics at The Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia.

Development of Approaches for Treatment

A recent recipient of the prestigious National Institutes of Health Pioneer Award for her transforming approaches to major challenges in biomedical and behavioral research, Dr. Bennett studies the molecular genetics of inherited retinal degenerations, to use this knowledge in developing approaches for treatment of these diseases, which include retinitis pigmentosa, age-related macular degeneration, Leber Congenital Amaurosis, Stargardt’s Disease, Choroideremia and Usher’s Syndrome.

Dr. Bennett’s work involves both the identification and characterization of defective genes that cause blindness, and the study of currently untreatable hereditary retinal degenerations. To gain an understanding of the mechanisms which lead to these diseases, Dr. Bennett’s lab generates these diseases in laboratory animals. For example, a recent study conducted in her lab and with collaborators at the
University of Pennsylvania, Cornell University and the University of Florida led to a remarkable reversal of blindness in a dog of a blinding disease that affects infants. This treatment is now being tested in human clinical trials.

Positive Results in Gene Transfer Treatments

A testament to her accomplishments, Dr. Bennett was named Scientific Director for the Phase I/II human clinical trial to evaluate the safety and efficacy of gene transfer treatments for Leber Congenital Amaurosis due to RPE65 mutations. This study, currently being carried out at the Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia is the first to report positive results in all twelve patients (aged 8 to 44 years). The greatest improvement was noted in the five children involved in the study.

Dr. Bennett received her BS from Yale University and her PhD from the University of California, Berkeley. She received her MD from Harvard Medical School and completed postdoctoral fellowships in Human Genetics at Yale University School of Medicine and in Developmental Genetics at the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine.

The Bressler Committee

The Bressler Committee’s goal is the selection of an accomplished vision care professional whose leadership, research and service have resulted in important advancements in the treatment of eye disease or rehabilitation of persons with vision loss, and whose work portends future excellence.

The Alfred W. Bressler Prize

The Bressler Prize was established by The Guild in 2001, through a bequest of Alfred W. Bressler, a New York attorney whose legal career spanned more than 70 years, most of that time with the law firm of Moses & Singer.

Brian A. Wandell, PhD, To Receive Guild/ARVO Oberdorfer Award

The Association for Research in Vision and Ophthalmology (ARVO) has chosen Brian A. Wandell, PhD, to receive the Oberdorfer Award in Low Vision at this year’s annual ARVO meeting in May. Dr. Wandell is Director of Stanford University’s Center for Cognitive and Neurobiological Imaging. He is also the Stein Family Professor in Stanford’s Department of Psychology. His research spans topics on how we see, such as visual disorders, reading development in children, digital imaging devices and algorithms.

The award was created by The Guild in collaboration with the ARVO Foundation for Eye Research because of The Guild’s special interest in low vision research and rehabilitation. Michael D. Oberdorfer, PhD, after whom the award is named, served for many years at the National Institute of Health’s National Eye Institute as Director of the Low Vision and Blindness Rehabilitation program.
The Guild’s Young Visionaries held their fifth annual fund-raising event in early February at the Mondrian SoHo, located in lower Manhattan with panoramic views. The event was co-chaired by Lauren Boxer, Rae Boxer, Keith Estabrook, Ervin Hechavarria, Angelina Lippert, Adam Solomon and Beth and Zach Solomon. The Visionaries come together to heighten awareness of The Guild’s mission and to raise funds in support of its programs and services. The Event Sponsor was Broadview Networks and the Corporate Sponsor was Safety Building Cleaning Corporation.
In February, The Guild’s SightCare program, in partnership with the New York State Nurses Association (NYSNA), conducted a live webinar entitled *Caring for People with Vision Loss*. The 90-minute webinar was attended by nurses from hospital, home care and community-based settings. The webinar is available as an online continuing education course through NYSNA.

The webinar provides an overview of the functional impact of vision loss and offers techniques for improving care. Simple interventions that can improve independence in Activities of Daily Living are demonstrated, in addition to environmental considerations for people with vision loss. Specialized low vision services are also discussed. This is followed by a discussion of ways to improve personal interactions and communication with patients with vision loss.

Guild Director of Vision Program Development Roy G. Cole, OD, Guild Director of Special Programs Gordon Rovins, MS, CEAC and Yu-Pin Hsu, MS, OTR/L, EdD, from Columbia Presbyterian Medical Center are the presenters.

The New York State Nurses Association, an accredited provider of continuing nursing education by the American Nurses Credentialing Center’s Commission on Accreditation, is the nation's oldest and largest multipurpose state professional association for registered nurses.

**SightCare Trains Healthcare Providers**

Developed by The Guild in 1998, SightCare trains providers across the healthcare spectrum, providing them with skills to meet the needs of people who are visually impaired and blind. We are also an American Occupational Therapy Association approved provider of continuing education.

SightCare’s educational materials, most of which are available in English and Spanish, have been distributed in all 50 states, Washington DC, Puerto Rico and 15 foreign countries. For more information on SightCare, or to order materials, call 800-539-4845 or visit www.sightcare.org.
The Guild is expanding the service areas of two of its health plans, GuildNet, its Managed Long Term Care (MLTC) plan and GuildNet Gold. These two plans together now serve more than 8,500 members. GuildNet’s expansion also includes the offering of a new plan, GuildNet Health Advantage.

**New Service Area for GuildNet MLTC**

GuildNet MLTC will now also be offered on Staten Island and in Westchester County in addition to the Bronx, Brooklyn, Manhattan, Queens, Nassau and Suffolk Counties.

GuildNet MLTC is the only MLTC that specifically addresses the chronic and complex healthcare needs of people with vision loss. Individuals with Medicaid who need nursing home level care, but are able to stay in their homes safely with the help of a coordinated and extensive range of home and community-based health services are eligible for GuildNet MLTC.

**New Service Area for GuildNet Gold**

GuildNet Gold, an integrated Medicare and Medicaid care plan will expand its service area to include Nassau and Suffolk Counties in addition to the Bronx, Brooklyn, Manhattan and Queens. GuildNet Gold provides the same services as GuildNet MLTC, and all benefits covered by Medicare which include doctor visits, hospitalizations, prescription drug coverage and much more.

**A New Plan**

GuildNet Health Advantage will be available in the Bronx, Brooklyn, Manhattan and Queens, as well as Nassau and Suffolk Counties.

GuildNet Health Advantage members will be provided with care that is coordinated between all providers in order to promote and improve health outcomes. For this plan, initial health assessments are conducted and then care plans and interventions including disease management programs are individualized for each member.

Both GuildNet Gold and GuildNet Health Advantage coordinate benefits and offer a Point of Service option that allows members to see Medicare providers out of network.

To learn more about GuildNet’s MLTC plan, call 1-800-932-4703.

To learn more about GuildNet Gold and GuildNet Health Advantage, call 1-800-815-0000.
Guild CEO and President Alan R. Morse, JD, PhD, will introduce the keynote speaker, Lois E.H. Smith, MD, PhD, at the National Association for Parents of Children with Visual Impairments’ (NAPVI) National/International Family Conference to be held in Newton, MA, July 27-29, 2012. Dr. Smith, a 2006 Guild Bressler Prize winner, is Professor of Ophthalmology at Children’s Hospital, Harvard Medical School. The focus of Dr. Smith’s research is retinopathy of prematurity.

College Preparation, Healthy Eating, New Technologies

Also participating will be Gordon Rovins, Director of Special Programs, who will moderate a panel of college students on the subject of preparing for college with a disability. Haben Girma, who received a scholarship from The Guild in 2006 and is now at Harvard Law (see article at bottom of this page), will be on the panel. Mr. Rovins will also be on a panel advising on sources of financial aid for college applicants.

Annemarie O’Hearn, The Guild’s Vice President for Education and Training, will be presenting at the conference. She will provide parents with simple ways to help their children develop and maintain healthy eating habits that contribute to lifelong health and disease prevention.

Chancey Fleet, Guild Adaptive Technology Specialist, will speak about new technologies that are available as well as applications for the Apple iPad that might be accessible to blind and visually impaired students.

NAPVI is a national, non-profit organization that enables parents to find information and resources for their children who are blind or visually impaired, including those with multiple disabilities. The organization provides leadership, support and training to assist parents in helping their children reach their full potential.

For additional information on the 2012 NAPVI Conference, to be held in Newton, MA, July 27-29, call Dan Callahan, Director of The Guild’s Children’s Vision Health Initiative, at 212-769-7815.

A GuildScholar Studies at Harvard Law

In 2006, Haben Girma, a student at Skyline High School in Oakland, CA, was one of fourteen high school students to receive a scholarship from The Guild as part of its GuildScholar program.

After graduating from high school, Ms. Girma, who is legally blind and also has a hearing impairment, went on to attend Lewis & Clark College in Portland, OR, where she majored in sociology/anthropology.

In her final year at Lewis & Clark, Ms. Girma served as a US delegate on Mobility International’s US/Costa Rica Disability Rights and Leadership Exchange. “I was part of a cross-cultural exchange that challenged our notions of disability, and through this experience I determined to become a stronger disability rights advocate,” she said recently.

Ms. Girma decided to study law because, “although I enjoyed anthropology, I realized I needed additional skills in order to help facilitate change. I’m in my second year at Harvard Law, choosing my own classes, including Music and Digital Media, Disability Law, Taxation and Employment Discrimination. At the moment I’m fascinated by the intersection of intellectual property and disability rights law.”
The Guild continues its collaboration with Columbia University Medical Center’s Department of Ophthalmology/Harkness Eye Institute, recently taking part in the month-long basic science course which focuses on resident training but also has proven useful for the visual sciences community.

As part of the course, Roy G. Cole, OD, Guild Director of Vision Program Development, gave a half-day program on low vision rehabilitation. He discussed vision loss and the rehabilitation interventions available. He also instructed the residents in providing clinical care, highlighting the services available to patients at The Guild.

**Scientific Frontiers in Ophthalmic Imaging**

One part of the basic science course is a full-day symposium, offered to residents as well as MDs and ODs. This year’s symposium, co-sponsored by The Guild and well attended, was entitled “Scientific Frontiers in Ophthalmic Imaging”. The aim of the symposium was to provide an overview of the many technologies now being applied for imaging the eye and their clinical application, with special emphasis on the latest developments.

**Clinical Rotation**

The Guild’s collaboration with Columbia University’s ophthalmology training extends to second-year residents who come to The Guild as part of their clinical rotation. They work with The Guild’s Director of Low Vision Rehabilitation Services, Laura Sperazza, OD, who trains them in the testing appropriate for low vision patients and in the use of low vision devices. She then provides supervision while they see their patients over a six-session period, reviewing the patients’ charts with them and together making decisions about care and referrals.

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**GuildNet Has Two New Senior Vice Presidents**

**Laura Brannigan, RN, MA**, has been promoted to Senior Vice President Quality Assurance / Performance Improvement, for GuildNet. She joined The Guild in 2005 as Director of Clinical Support Services for GuildNet. Before joining The Guild, Ms. Brannigan was Director of Performance Improvement, Community Services, for The Jewish Home & Hospital LifeCare of New York. She received her BSN from Adelphi University, her MA from Hofstra University, and her BS from Syracuse University.

**Ruth O’Neal, RN, MA**, has been promoted to Senior Vice President, Intake, for GuildNet. She joined The Guild in 2001, as a Nurse Case Manager. Before coming to The Guild, Ms. O’Neal worked for the Montefiore Home Health Agency. She received her BS in Nursing from Lehman College in the Bronx and her MA from Iona College in New Rochelle.
Workplace Tech Offers Training on Apple Products

The Guild’s Center for Workplace Technology, part of the Rehabilitation Services Department, recently expanded its technology training and is now offering assessment and instruction on the Apple Macintosh operating system as well as the iPad to the growing number of blind and visually impaired people who use Apple products. These are known for their built-in accessibility features, which include VoiceOver (screen reader) and Zoom (screen magnification).

Importance of Hand Gestures

Training is similar to that which the Center has provided for some years on PCs except that the Apple platform has many features that PCs don’t have, at least not yet. One such feature is the hand gesturing that allows the user to activate the accessibility features, something that many people with vision impairment find easier to deal with than searching for the correct keys on a keyboard.

Students, who are referred to The Guild by the New York State Commission for the Blind and Visually Handicapped, are taught how to manage these accessibility features with the use of mainstream software and third-party applications. These may include Microsoft Word, iWork pages, the Internet, e-mail, and scanning/reading software such as Kurzweil 3000.

A Seminar Devoted to Low Vision Products

Freedom Scientific®, one of the country’s leading designers and manufacturers of vision enhancement devices and computer software for visually impaired computer users, recently visited The Guild to take part in a Low Vision Awareness Day. Staff from Freedom Scientific led in-depth discussions on the latest in scanning and reading devices for the desktop as well as smaller hand-held magnifiers. Roy G. Cole, OD, Guild Director of Vision Program Development, presented an overview of Guild programs and services and talked about the difference between vision care and vision rehabilitation.
Guild Clients Enjoy Two Classical Music Recitals

Guild clients from the Continuing Day Treatment Program and students from the Harriet and Robert Heilbrunn Guild School recently enjoyed two recitals organized by Guild Music Therapist Fred Paterno, MA, ACMT, and brought to The Guild under the auspices of Pro Musicis, an organization that provides concert opportunities to world-class musicians.

Pianist Plays Bach and Elliott Carter

Pianist Maya Hartman performed pieces by J. S. Bach, Franz Schubert and Elliott Carter. Ms. Hartman has appeared as a soloist with orchestras as well as in recitals in the United States, Canada, England, and Switzerland as well as in Israel, her native country.

Solo and Chamber Music for Guitars and Flute

Guitarists Luiz Mantovani and Emanuele Segre, from Brazil and Italy respectively, accompanied by flautist Michel de Paula (also from Brazil), performed music by Isaac Albéniz, Heitor Villa-Lobos and Liduíno Pitombeira. The day after their Guild recital, the three musicians, as well as another guitarist and a cellist, performed in Weill Recital Hall at Carnegie Hall as part of a celebration of the 46th anniversary of Pro Musicis.

Founded in France in 1965, part of Pro Musicis’ mission is to share the talent of its musicians through community-service performances, such as those at The Guild.

Laurie Rubin Sings

Former Guild client and celebrated mezzo-soprano Laurie Rubin recently launched her new CD, “Do You Dream in Color”. The CD, released on the Bridge Records label, features as its title track a setting of a poem by Ms. Rubin about her life as an artist who happens to be blind. The poem is set to music by Bruce Adolphe.
At The Guild

Guild President and CEO Alan R. Morse, JD, PhD, presented “Avoiding the Fate of the Scorpion and the Frog” at a Symposium on Risk Adjustment for Integrated Care, sponsored by the Massachusetts Medicaid Policy Institute in Boston, February 2012.

Verena Cimarolli, PhD, Jewish Home Lifecare; Alan R. Morse, JD, PhD; Amy Horowitz, DWS, Fordham University and Joann P. Reinhardt, PhD, Jewish Home Lifecare, authored “Impact of vision impairment on intensity of occupational therapy utilization and outcomes in subacute rehabilitation”, in the American Journal of Occupational Therapy, 66 (2), March/April 2012.

Dr. Morse also wrote an editorial “Talking to patients about vision loss and rehabilitation” in the February 2012 Archives of Ophthalmology, 130 (2), 235-236.

Paul P. Lee, MD, JD, Department of Ophthalmology, Columbia University College of Physicians and Surgeons and Alan R. Morse, JD, PhD, wrote an editorial “Comparative Effectiveness: Insights on Treatment Options for Open-Angle Glaucoma” in the April 2012 Archives of Ophthalmology, 130 (4), 506-507.

César A. Alfonso, MD, Guild Psychiatrist, recently presented “Contributions of Psychoanalysis to the Practice of Psychotherapy in the United States” at a conference entitled Psychoanalysis and Dynamic Psychiatry: Transcultural Aspects in Training and Practice, held at Chulalongkorn University in Bangkok, Thailand.

Laura Brannigan, RN, MA, GuildNet Senior Vice President Quality Assurance/Performance Improvement authored “Medication Compliance” in ADVANCE for Nurses – Northeast, vol. 12, no. 3, February 2012. The article describes GuildNet’s finding that automated medication dispensing improves patient outcomes.

Sandra Birnbaum, RN, FNP, MPH, joins The Guild as Assistant Vice President, Medicare Services for GuildNet. Before coming to The Guild, she worked for Comprehensive Care Management, New York. She received her BS in Nursing from Case Western Reserve University, her FNP from Hahnemann Hospital, Worcester, MA, her MPH from the State University of New York (SUNY), Albany and her BS from Cornell University.

Elizabeth Meyer, CRRN, BSN, joins The Guild as Quality Assurance / Performance Improvement Supervisor for GuildNet. Prior to joining The Guild, she worked for the Cold Spring Hills Long Term Home Healthcare Program in Woodbury, NY. She received her nursing training at SUNY, Farmingdale and her BSN from Molloy College.

GUILDNET PROMOTIONS

Maria Fallon, RN, has been promoted to Staff Development Specialist for GuildNet. She joined The Guild in 2007 as a Nurse Case Manager for GuildNet.

Frachely Miranda-Peralta, RN, has been promoted to Intake Supervisor for GuildNet. She joined The Guild in 2007 as an Intake Case Manager for GuildNet.
Deyanira Peña-Martínez, LMSW, joins The Guild as a Social Worker for GuildNet. Before coming to The Guild, she worked for the Lincoln Medical and Mental Health Center in the Bronx. She received her MSW from Yeshiva University and her BA from Hunter College.

Vernon C. Lee, RN, WCC, joins The Guild as a Program Nurse for GuildCare℠ Manhattan. Before joining The Guild, he worked in the Advanced Wound Care Clinic at Beth Israel Medical Center. He received his nursing training at Phillips Beth Israel School of Nursing.

Andrea Ahanonu, RN; Deborah Arcaria, RN; Susan DeLeonardis-Linton, RN; Belinda Duncan, RN; Beverly Pearrear RN; Bibiane Sykes, RN; and Deborah Walker, RN, join The Guild as Nurse Case Managers for GuildNet. Jean-Pierre Diaz joins The Guild as a Marketing Associate for GuildNet.

Karen Ducreay joins The Guild as Activities Coordinator at GuildCare Albany. Before coming to The Guild she worked at Emeritus at Colonie Manor, a retirement community in Latham, NY. She received her BSE from SUNY Cortland.

Guild Adaptive Technology Specialist Chancey Fleet was interviewed for the article “Braille comes unbound from the book: how technology can stop a literary crisis”, published on the website (www.guardian.co.uk) of the British newspaper *The Guardian*, 2.14.12. The article describes how Apple products, such as the iPad, iPhone and iPod Touch are at the forefront of technology helping Braille replace text-to-speech audio for users who are blind.
Guild Students Go to Work!

When students at The Guild’s Harriet and Robert Heilbrunn School reach the age of 14, they spend time as interns in local businesses or non-profit organizations.

The cafeteria at St. Luke’s-Roosevelt Hospital Center was recently added to the list of sites that welcomes Guild students. St. Luke’s-Roosevelt’s Volunteer Services Department is a long time supporter of the internship program.

Among other sites that support the program are lululemon athletica, a retailer of yoga-inspired athletic apparel, and Hunter College. The program allows Guild students to experience a wide range of real-life everyday situations that help them develop interpersonal skills, good judgment, self-confidence and self-respect.

Valerie Liranzo wipes down a table in the cafeteria at St. Luke’s-Roosevelt Hospital Center.

Gabriel Tolama puts garments on hangers at lululemon athletica’s Broadway store.