

UMRA U NEWSLETTER

A Communication of the University of Minnesota Retirees Association

OCTOBER 2009

Karen Mesce to speak on mechanisms basic to treatment of Parkinson's, spinal injuries

In the mid-1980s a committee was formed at the University to develop a Ph.D. program in neuroscience—giving rise to a graduate faculty with members from 12



departments in four different colleges. But when it began to develop a curriculum, it discovered that among the more than two dozen excellent neuroscientists they had found, there was no expert in

the nervous systems of primitive creatures. Much of the basic laboratory research in the nervous system had been done in simple organisms with the medicinal leech in a starring role. Any respectable Ph.D. program in neuroscience required someone to teach basic courses and laboratory techniques.

But Lady Luck was smiling. There was an impending retirement in the entomology department and the chair thought it would be an excellent idea to fill the vacancy with a neurobiologist who specialized in invertebrates. After a thorough search, Karen Mesce was hired as an assistant professor. She has been at the University ever since, rising to the rank of professor.

Professor Mesce received her undergraduate degree from the University of California, San Diego, and her Ph.D. from the University of Oregon. Her research is concentrated on understanding how neurons change

during development in simple systems. She is also concerned about how the nervous system controls physical movement.

She has entitled her talk “Leech locomotion: understanding the neural mechanisms of movement, one crawl step at a time.”

In her words: “For most of us, we can chew gum and walk at the same time! We do not have to remind ourselves to place the right leg out first, bring it back and do the same for the other leg. So how does the nervous system control rhythmic behaviors like walking or crawling? One theory is that the nervous system within each body segment (or region of spinal cord) has its own “unit burst generator” to control rhythmic movements. By studying a simpler model system of locomotion (the medicinal leech), we have revealed where these unit burst generators reside, and have established that each body segment has a complete generator. Furthermore, we determined that dopamine can turn each of these burst generators on. Most recently, we established how these individual oscillators are coordinated with each other. Because dopamine affects movement in many different animals, including humans, our studies may help to identify treatments for Parkinson's patients and those with spinal cord injury.”

We are more like the leech than you ever would have thought. Karen is a scientist who can entertain while dealing with science. Come and join your friends in what will be an intriguing 45-minute talk.

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

OCTOBER
LUNCHEON MEETING

Tuesday

October 27, 2009

11:30 a.m. – 1:30 p.m.

Featured Speaker

Karen Mesce, professor in the U's Department of Entomology
“Understanding Neural Mechanisms of Movement, One Crawl Step at a Time”

Location

Conference Room ABC
Campus Club, Fourth Floor
Coffman Memorial Union,
East Bank Campus, U of M

Cost

Prepayment: \$12 per person;
\$14 at door, for reservations that are not prepaid.

Reservation Deadline

Thursday, October 22

To reserve your place(s) and take advantage of prepaid price, send a check, payable to UMRA, to UMRA Reservations, c/o John Anderson, 1332 Como Blvd. E., St. Paul, MN 55117. Contact John at 651-489-4330 or e-mail: ander049@umn.edu.

Reservations requested after Oct. 22 will be on a waiting list. Please let us know about cancellations by noon, Oct. 22.

Parking

Parking is available in the East River Road Garage at UMRA's membership discount, \$5.00 for the entire day.

Board Meeting at 10 a.m.

UMRA NEWSLETTER

A NOTE FROM THE PRESIDENT

As a political scientist I view with great professional interest the contentious times we are experiencing in the United States today. The political rhetoric is sharp and passionate and rigid and at times intensely personal. We in UMRA can remember 50 or even 60 years of the political life of our nation and have witnessed many contentious issues that have been addressed and resolved. But, is the debate we are currently experiencing more sharp and bitter and nasty than what we have experienced in the past? Or is there something new and different today in American political life? Some talking heads on television see it one way; some the other. Is there any hard evidence one side or the other?

In 1991 David Mayhew, a political scientist at Yale, published a book on party control in Congress from 1946 to 1990 and how it manifested itself in the legislative process. He studied 267 of what he considered the major acts of Congress in that period. I think most of you would be completely surprised by his findings.

Of the 267 major acts he examined, 206 were passed with two-thirds of the members of each party in both houses supporting the legislation with another 43 receiving two-thirds vote of each party in one house. Only 18 received a two-thirds vote of neither party in both houses. This looks to me as if the Congress of the

United States acted in a very bi-partisan manner in the overwhelming majority of cases over a 44-year period. Bitter conflict between the parties is not much in evidence in this view of congressional behavior.

Let's look at this from another perspective. Many Americans look at elections as deciding which political party will enact its agenda into the law of the land. If one party wins both houses of Congress and the White House, it should be able to pass what it wants while ignoring the interest of the minority party (except in the Senate where 60 votes are required to overcome a unified and determined opposition). Pretty strict party line votes are what might be expected. But in the cases Mayhew studied, nothing could be further from the truth. If we define a strict party line vote as one in which 90 percent of the members of the majority party support the bill, and 90 percent of the minority party oppose the bill, then none of the 267 acts that Mayhew analyzed passed on a party line vote.

This striking bi-partisan Congressional system and the public opinion that supported it began to break down after 1990, and today we witness its almost total demise. What we see today is not what we have experienced through most of our lives.

Robert Holt, President

UMRA's archive project is under way

Throughout its history, UMRA has been active in serving the interests of University retirees and the larger University community. Last spring, the Board approved a project intended to gather the accumulated records of the association—including Board minutes, papers of association officers, copies of the Newsletter, and other materials—and to place them in the University Archives. An UMRA collection presently exists there, but contains only materials related to the Volunteers Office. Several weeks ago, Judy and John Howe met with Karen Spilman, Collections Archivist, to establish the process of gathering and arranging records relevant to UMRA's many activities and transferring them to the Archives. The first group of materials, formerly located in the UMRA office in the McNamara Center, has been transferred, and letters have gone out to past presidents and other association officers inquiring about relevant records

they may have and suggesting arrangements for adding them to the UMRA archive. Anyone having information or suggestions concerning the project should contact either Judy or John Howe at 651-645-2584, or via e-mail at howex002@umn.edu.

In Memoriam

We report the passing of UMRA members as we learn of losses to our UMRA community. Our condolences to the families of:

Lenore Lang Auerbach; her husband Carl, Law, is a member
Lillie M. Harrison, Music; d. July 10, 2009

Cressie Holberg, d. March 20, 2008; her husband Donald,
Physical Plant, is an UMRA member

Mary Mantis, Immigration History Research Center; d.

August 2, 2009, husband Homer, Physics, is a member

Lillian Williams, Law, d. November 21, 2008

Update Report — Upcoming Health Fairs and Health Plans for 2010

Now that the University is back in session and the leaves of summer are starting to change and fall, it is time once again to begin to be thinking about your choice of health and medical care coverage options offered through the U Plan next year. Although open-enrollment is not scheduled to begin until November 1st and run to the end of the month, here is an advance look at what you can expect to pay for coverage under the various plan options in 2010.

Overall, with the exception of Blue Cross Blue Shield's U of M Retiree Plan, which is down 3.5 percent or -\$21.99 per month and -\$143.88 for the year, the cost of coverage for medical care will be somewhat higher next year. Medica's Group Prime Solution is up 5.8 percent, or \$15 per month and \$180 for the year; Health Partner's Freedom Plan is up 4.5 percent, or \$11.30 per month and \$135.60 for the year; and UCare for Seniors is up 3.5 percent or \$9.00 per month, \$108 for the year.

By plan, Blue Cross Blue Shield's U of M Retiree Plan remains the most expensive option at \$3,929.52 for the year, followed by Medica's Group Prime Solution at \$3,300, U Care For Seniors at \$3,192, and Health Partners' Freedom Plan at \$3,174.

As for dental coverage, the good news is that the dental rates will be remaining the same as they have been this year.

Discount Program continues to expand

UMRA's discount program goes well beyond parking, Intercollegiate Sports tickets, and the Bookstores this year. Your renewal letter mentions the Campus Club, the Landscape Arboretum, and Osher Lifelong Learning Institute.

The special offer to UMRA members to join the **Osher Lifelong Learning Institute** as first-time joiners is dues of \$175 rather than \$195. Check out OLLI at www.cce.umn.edu/olli or email olliregb@umn.edu for information or to be placed on the mailing list.

Campus Club — UMRA members receive a 20 percent discount (annual dues reduced from \$120 to \$96, payable quarterly or annually) on their Campus Club membership fee. Campus Club/UMRA members must document their interest with an application. See UMRA's website: www.umn.edu/umra.

Upcoming events for Campus Club members include:
Wine Sensory Class - Wednesday, October 28 - Improve your wine vocabulary with Nicolas Smith
Scotch Tasting - Friday, November 13 - with John Saucke
Jack Aubrey Dinner - Thursday, November 19

For further information, see the Employee Benefits Newsletter slated to be sent out later this month, or attend one of the **Health Fairs scheduled for Tuesday, November 3, from 10 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. in the Great Hall at Coffman Union in Minneapolis or Wednesday, November 4, from 10 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. in the St. Paul Student Center's North Star Ballroom.**

Note: If you are **not** planning to make any changes in your health plan coverage, there is nothing further that you need to do and your current medical and dental plans will remain the same as it is this year.

— Ted Litman UMRA Representative
U of M Benefits Advisory Committee

Help facilitate blood donations, volunteer for the Red Cross

The Red Cross provides aid to people in accidents, fires, tornadoes and other natural disasters, providing shelter, food, clothing, as needed. But one of its most important jobs, is collecting blood for the victims of these disasters and other hospitalized patients. And, as we know, the supply is rarely enough to meet the needs.

By doing a small volunteer job, you can have a huge impact on this community service. The University Retirees Volunteer Center (URVC) can link you up with the Red Cross Blood Donor program as a greeter, to register donors who visit one of the five metro area blood donation centers or any of the bloodmobiles that move around the community going to businesses, schools, or other venues. Another important job is in assisting donors after they have given blood by sitting with them and providing refreshments in the "canteen," making sure they are all right and summoning a nurse if needed. These jobs provide an opportunity for you to meet and talk with fascinating members of the community and express your appreciation for their donation of blood.

URVC currently has 25 volunteers on its list who work as greeters or canteen aides and we would like to increase that number. If this job interests you, or you would like to find out more about it (or other volunteer opportunities), contact the URVC at urvc@umn.edu or 612-625-8016. The office is staffed 9 a.m. to noon, weekdays. At other times, leave a message and someone will get back to you. Everyone is welcome to help out, retiree or not, UM-connected or not. Volunteering is rewarding and enjoyable!

—Judy Rosenblatt, board member and volunteer, URVC

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**Have you changed your
address, e-mail, or phone?**

1. Print new information below.
2. Cut out this form **and address label**.
3. Mail both to the address above.

Name _____
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City, State _____
Zip _____ Phone _____
E-mail _____
Other Info _____

**UMRA Membership Committee talks with
CHS, exploring benefits for members**

An affiliation has been forged with the University's Center for Spiritual Healing (CHS) for discounts for their programs. CHS enriches health and well-being by providing high-quality interdisciplinary education, conducting rigorous research, and delivering innovative programs that advance integrative health and healing. CHS extends offers and savings to UMRA members to attend center programs and events. Mark your calendars for the following events:

The Purpose Project: Working on Purpose with Richard Leider; one-day workshop, November 16, 9 a.m. - 4 p.m.

A popular retreat designed for people who want to explore alternatives to the conventional notion of retiring. The registration fee of \$145 includes lunch and all materials. UMRA members will receive a 10 percent discount on registration. Call Beth Somerville, 612-626-2395.

Deepak Chopra: Special Event and Book Signing at Northrop, October 20, at 7:30 p.m.

Deepak Chopra, with his latest book: *Reinventing the Body, Resurrecting the Soul*. Tickets, \$24-\$40, include a copy of his book; tickets now available at www.northrop.umn.edu or by calling 612-624-2345.

New members as of September 2009

Please give a hearty welcome to new members who recently joined UMRA. Greet them at the next lunch program and add this information to your 2008-09 directories.

John S. Adams, Geography
2611 W. 46th St., Minneapolis, MN 55410-1902
612-925-1340

Joseph and Susan DiSalvo, Physiology
652 Overlook Drive, Roseville, MN 55112
651-482-9139

Robert W. Kovarik, Cancer Center
2100 Berkeley Ave., St. Paul, MN 55105
651-690-0779

Thomas W. Shaughnessy, U Libraries
5705 Wycliffe Rd., Edina, MN 55436
952-922-5381

Alan E. and Linda Shapiro, History of Science/Physics
95 Bedford St. S.E., Minneapolis, MN 55414-3525
612-379-4307

Lois K. and Lee Stark, Office of Information Technology
5760-138th St. Ct., Apple Valley, MN 55126
952-432-5098

Keep current with a visit to the association's new web site:
www.umn.edu/umra
