This summer, Nancy N. Rabalais, LUMCON's executive director, received two prestigious environmental research awards, the National Water Research Institute's (NWRI) Athalie Richardson Irvine Clarke Prize and the Ruth Patrick Award from the American Society for Limnology and Oceanography (ASLO).

In July, Rabalais became the fifteenth laureate of the NWRI's Clarke Prize, one of the most prestigious awards in the world as determined by the International Congress of Distinguished Awards. Rabalais travelled to Huntington Beach, CA to accept the Clarke Prize for her 25 years of research on human-induced changes in water quality, particularly the long-term environmental impacts of excess nutrients on marine ecosystems.

The NWRI established the Clarke Prize in 1993 in honor of the late Athalie Richardson Irvine Clarke and her vision to recognize the vital importance of water and promote better water science and technology. In 1991, Clarke co-founded NWRI along with her daughter Joan Irvine Smith, who presented the award to Dr. Rabalais. Clarke said that “Nothing is more important than the careful stewardship and development of our water resources.”

Each year NWRI holds a formal ceremony in which Smith presents a gold medallion and the award of the $50,000 prize. In receipt of the award, Rabalais presented a lecture entitled “Ecosystem Science Informs Sound Policy... or Does It?” where she discussed the effects of hypoxia and harmful algal blooms in the Gulf of Mexico and other coastal waters nationwide. During the ceremony, Rabalais thanked her family members, collaborators and others who helped make her research possible, and as she accepted the $50,000 prize, she noted, “This check is not made out to me but to LUMCON for continued research.”

Less than a month before, in June, Rabalais was awarded the Ruth Patrick Award from the American Society for Limnology and Oceanography. This professional organization has worked to provide for the needs of aquatic science researchers for over 50 years. The society initiated the Ruth Patrick Award in 1989 to honor outstanding research by a scientist in the application of basic aquatic science principles to the identification, analysis and/or solution of important environmental problems.

Rabalais accepted the Ruth Patrick Award for her accomplishments in Marine Science at the 2008 ASLO Summer Meeting in St. John's, Newfoundland, Canada. Former LUMCON Director Don Boesch, who is currently with the University of Maryland's Center for Environmental Science, nominated Rabalais for the award. Boesch believes Rabalais deserves recognition because “[she] has embodied the spirit of Dr. Ruth Patrick... achieving outstanding accomplishments in the application of diverse scientific principles toward the identification, analysis, and solution of one of the most significant environmental problems in aquatic environments — the dramatic expansion of hypoxia in coastal waters during the latter part of the 20th century.”
Dr. Nancy Rabalais, Dr. Sally Clausen, President of Southeastern Louisiana University, will be the new President ofULL, as a result of his retirement. There will be a new President ofULL, as a result of his retirement. Therewill be anew President ofULL, as a result of his retirement. There will be a new President ofULL, as a result of his retirement. There will be a new President ofULL, as a result of his retirement. There will be a new President ofULL, as a result of his retirement. There will be a new President ofULL, as a result of his retirement. There will be a new President ofULL, as a result of his retirement. There will be anew President ofULL, as a result of his retirement. There will be anew President ofULL, as a result of his retirement. There will be anew President ofULL, as a result of his retirement. There will be anew President ofULL, as a result of his retirement. There will be anew President ofULL, as a result of his retirement. 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LUMCON News Vol. 8, No. 1 Page 2

LUMCON News Vol. 8, No. 1 Page 3
LUMCON Shares Science With Public

Once again, LUMCON doors opened to the public with an invitation to experience science. On April 26th, LUMCON’s Open House played host to hundreds. As visitors drove down Highway 56, past the Cocodrie water tower, to the so-called “building that looks like an airport sticking up in the marsh,” they were greeted with signs that led them into activities that engaged them in oceanographic science.

Activities ranged from building model plankton out of playdough and racing them in a water-column tube to putting a model phytoplankton together identifying its parts to watching how a moored instrument is changed underwater.

Again this year the kids participated in a scavenger hunt to guide them through the exhibits while special activities kept the adults out of their way. Inside visitors touched marine animals in the touch tanks while outside they took mud grab samples from the deck of the R/V Acadiana, one of LUMCON’s research vessels, and another outdoor activity that taught visitors how scientists sort animals caught in a trawl.

The salinity taste test was one of the new activities this year. LUMCON’s environmental monitoring program puts instruments in the water to measure a variety of parameters including salinity. Inspired by the old Pepsi vs Coca Cola taste test, Brenda Leroux Babin, manager of the environmental monitoring program and Open House committee chair, came up with a way for the public to “experience” what the instruments measure. She designed a scientific experiment whereby an individual tastes water samples and guesses the salinity value. Then they compared the guess with the reading from the instruments. Some were extremely good at guessing the salinity while others needed more training, but everyone had a good time trying.

“I love Open House,” LUMCON University Education Coordinator Nicole Cotten said. She often hosts public groups visiting the facility. “It is when all of LUMCON puts their best foot forward for the public,” Cotten said.

“It was awesome seeing employees come together to plan and participate. This Open House was truly a time when all of LUMCON came together as a team,” Babin said.

LUMCON Employee Focus: Dr. Brian Roberts, Assistant Professor

LUMCON’s new Assistant Professor, Dr. Brian Roberts, joined LUMCON in August 2007 as an aquatic ecosystem ecologist. He says he is “interested in understanding how human activities affect the capacity of aquatic ecosystems to process and retain nutrients and energy along the continuum from headwater streams and lakes to large rivers, estuaries, and oceans.”

His research is broadly focused in three areas: ecosystem ecology and biogeochemistry, human-induced environmental impacts on aquatic ecosystems, and restoration ecology.

A native of upstate New York, Roberts obtained his BS in Biology and Philosophy from the College of William and Mary, where he began conducting ecological research. His next research experience was with Dr. Ivan Valiela at the Marine Biological Laboratory in Woods Hole, MA where he became interested in how human activities impact estuarine and coastal ecosystems. While working on a variety of projects in the coastal waters of Cape Cod, Roberts decided that in order to truly understand the multitude of factors influencing coastal ecosystems he needed to better understand the upstream inputs to them. This led to his Ph.D. work with Dr. Bob Howarth at Cornell University. Roberts’ Ph.D. research focused on developing a new approach to measuring the production and consumption of oxygen and carbon in lake ecosystems so that rates of aquatic photosynthesis and respiration can be better predicted. As part of this work, Roberts examined the factors that influence whether phytoplankton, microscopic algae that form the base of aquatic food chains, or bacteria are responsible for the lack of respiration in lakes.

Roberts continued his journey upstream as a post-doctoral researcher associate working with Dr. Pat Mulholland at Oak Ridge National Laboratory (ORNL). At ORNL, Roberts worked on several projects aimed at understanding the controls on stream chemistry and ecosystem metabolism (photosynthesis and respiration) in forested streams. Several of these projects remain a part of Roberts’ research program.

Shortly after beginning his position at LUMCON, faculty members Mike Dagg and Dr. Rodney Powell invited Roberts to participate in a sampling cruise associated with a project to assess the influence of marsh-coastal ocean exchanges on the net metabolism of Terrebonne Bay. Net metabolism is the relative balance between the production of carbon by plant-life in the system and consumption of carbon by all organisms (e.g., plants, bacteria, animals). Roberts has also begun a project focused on determining the relative contribution of phytoplankton and bacteria to ecosystem respiration in Terrebonne Bay. “My hope is that through these research efforts we acquire enough compelling data to be able to develop a sustained research program to benefit the bay on which LUMCON resides” Roberts said.

Roberts’ research program at LUMCON is off to a good start with a three year funded project to study carbon and nutrient transport and transformations in the Atchafalaya River Delta ecosystem. Collaborating with LUMCON Executive Director and Professor Dr. Nancy Rabalais and LSU Professor Dr. Gene Turner, he proposes to fill an important gap in our current understanding of the delivery of nutrients and organic matter to the northern Gulf of Mexico. Roberts recognizes that the biogeochemistry of the Atchafalaya system has been understudied despite carrying approximately 30% of the water from the Mississippi River Basin and delivering its nutrient and organic matter load through the shallow Atchafalaya Bay to the middle of the northern Gulf of Mexico hypoxic area. “We are using monitoring, field sampling, and experiments conducted at continuous, monthly and quarterly intervals to quantify rates of nutrient and organic matter loading and processing in the lower Atchafalaya River and Bay and ultimately the northern Gulf of Mexico,” Roberts said. He says that the overall goal of studying the Atchafalaya River/Bay system is “to establish a research program that links current efforts in the Atchafalaya River with Rabalais’ offshore studies in the Atchafalaya plume so that we can gain a more complete understanding of the role biogeochemical processes in this system plays in the health of the Gulf.”

He has conducted research in diverse aquatic habitats along the aquatic continuum from headwater streams to the open ocean carrying temperate and tropical streams, north temperate lakes, rivers, salt marshes, coastal bays and the Caribbean Sea. Roberts has consistently focused on understanding the effect of upstream influences on downstream ecosystems. Now that he has come full circle by returning to coastal waters at LUMCON, he says that he hopes that his background and understanding of the interactions that occur between ecosystems carrying downstream along the freshwater-estuary-open ocean continuum will aid in addressing the numerous pressing environmental issues impacting Louisiana’s coast.
Winners List:

Grand Prize and People's Choice Awards:
Penny Bentz, of Schriever, photo on right

Kids Division: 1st Place & two Honorable Mentions, Kyla D'Arensburg from Zachary, 2nd Place, Benjamin Fonville of Lecompte, and 3rd Place, Hannah and Tessa LaFleur of Thibodaux, Honorable Mention, Theresa Leblanc of Bourg.

Teen Division: 1st Place, Noelle Savoy from Lafayette, 3rd Place, Gage Seaux from Lafayette, Honorable Mention, Noel Bussey of Bourg.

Adults Division: 1st Place, Renee Bellow of Lafayette, 2nd, 3rd Place & Honorable Mention, Cody Sewell of Prairieville, Honorable Mention, Amy Scaroni of Baton Rouge and Dana Rolke of Carencro.

Employee Division: Nicole Cotten, 1st, 2nd and 3rd Place. Gwen Duplantis, Honorable Mention.

LUMCON Hosts 2008 Annual Graduate Student Symposium

Members of the Marine Environmental Researchers (MER) a graduate student organization at Louisiana State University, hosted the ninth annual Graduate Student Symposium from February 22-24, 2008 at the LUMCON Marine Center. Since 1999, when graduate students of the University of South Alabama, the University of Southern Mississippi, and Louisiana State University joined together to create an opportunity for students in marine, biological and environmental sciences to present their research in a supportive, non-threatening environment, the Graduate Student Symposium has been an annual spring event with each school taking turns as host.

Now the participation of eight universities extends beyond the Gulf of Mexico. Abstracts were collected and accepted for students in any stage of their research for both oral and poster presentations. Participants numbered 56 oral presentations and 13 poster presentations with over 80 students attending.

The overall winner of the oral presentations was Alison N. Rellinger from the University of South Alabama in Mobile.

Rellinger presented her works on the “Occurrence and Turnover of DMSP and DMS in the Deep Waters of the Ross Sea, Antarctica.” The graduate students also voted Rellinger as the People's Choice.

Melissa Baustian, LSU graduate student, placed 2nd for her oral presentation, “The Effect of Light on Hypoxic Bottom Water Oxygen Concentrations in the Northern Gulf of Mexico,” with 3rd place by Mary Elizabeth Miller from DISL. Miller's worked was titled, “The influence of ecological and physical factors on the settlement and viability of the moon jelly (Scyphozoa: Aurelia sp.) in the northern Gulf of Mexico.”

Padmanava Dash of LSU, received first place for his poster presentation, “Quantitative Mapping of Cyanobacterial Blooms for OCEANSAT-1 OCM Satellite Data: An Empirical Approach.” Caleb McMahan, SELU received honorable mention for his poster presentation.

As one of the many planners of this event and first time attendee and participant, Amy Spaziani, LSU student working on her masters in Oceanography, said that she was quite happy at the end of the banquet when it was all over. “The symposium not only provided a good opportunity to present research in a professional setting, but also an opportunity to learn about other students’ research from other schools as well as others on the Gulf Coast,” Spaziani said.
The Estuarine Research Federation (ERF) held its 19th Biennial International Conference in Providence, Rhode Island November 4 through November 8, 2007 with two LUMCON employees as presenters. Carrie M. Semmler, a LUMCON Research Assistant, presented research on Marsh-Coastal Exchanges and the New Metabolic State of Terrebonne Bay. Co-authors included LUMCON’s Mike Daigle, Rodney Powell, Nazan Atilla, and Jean Rabalais. Also presenting was Executive Director and Professor Dr. Nancy Rabalais. Her presentation, co-authored by Eugene R. Turner, of Louisiana State University, was on Where, How, and How Much to Reduce Nutrients that Cause Gulf of Mexico Eutrophication.

LUMCON Research Assistant Carrie Semmler and Executive Director and Professor Dr. Nancy Rabalais gave presentations at the 2008 Summer Meeting of the American Society of Limnology and Oceanography in St. John’s, Newfoundland, Canada.

Executive Director of LUMCON Dr. Nancy Rabalais was elected as one of four new Trustees of the Consortium for Ocean Leadership (COL). She assumed her three-year term at the Annual Meeting on March 8, 2008. COL is the newly constituted combined Consortium for Ocean Research and Education and Joint Oceanographic Institution.

LUMCON’s Marine Superintendent Joseph “Joc” Malbrough was named Vice Chair of the Research Vessel Operators Committee (RVOC) at Old Dominion University in Norfolk, VA at their April 22 to 24, 2008 annual meeting. Malbrough will serve a 3 year term.

See more news at www.lumcon.edu

News Bites

The America’s Wetlands Conservation Corps escorted by Nicole Cotten, education instructor, who gave them a tour of the LUMCON facility.

Publications


Grants

Rabalais, N. N., Principal Investigator, D. Daigle, Co-Investigator, Coastal Restoration through Enhanced Science and Technology (CREST), NOAA Office of Response and Restoration, $1,442,000.

Rabalais, N. N., Principal Investigator, The Potential Effects of Environmental Stressors on the Diatom Pseudo-nitzschia pseudodelicatissima and Cyanobacteria-Common HAB Species in Louisiana., LSU Sea Grant / NOAA, $12,702

Rabalais, N. N., Principal Investigator, B. L. Babin, Co-Investigator, Standardization of Local Data Network Nodes in the GCOOS-RA, Texas A & M Research Foundation DOC/NOAA, $22,701


Sparks, S., Principal Investigator, The Gulf of Mexico Program 2008, EPA/Gulf of Mexico Program, $78,950

St. Pé, K., Principal Investigator, BTNEP EPA2008, US Environmental Protection Agency, $428,000

Visser, J., Principal Investigator, Coastal Wetlands Planning, Protection, and Restoration Act (CWPPRA), Priority Project List Number 18, Dept. of Defense, Army Corps of Engineers, $103,400

LUMCON News Vol. 8, No. 1 Page 7
Art from LUMCON's Coastal Landscape Photography Class

Works entitled “In Black & White” from LUMCON’s Permanent Collection of Louisiana’s Retreating Coast and Communities were shown in an exhibit at the The Turchin Center for the Visual Arts, Appalachian State University in Boone, NC. The center is located downtown in the Gateway Plaza. The exhibit was held from April 4 to August 2, 2008. Lunch-and-learn events took place on April 23 and July 9. The collection is featured on page 15 of the Spring/Summer 08 The Turchin Center for the Visual Arts issue. For the past nine years, LUMCON has been offering this unique course. Utilizing the magnificent and endangered backdrop of the local estuary, the course introduces black and white photography. The exhibited collection was developed by LUMCON University Education Coordinator, Nicole Cotten, along with artists and Assistant Professor Karin Eberhardt and Department Head, Professor Dennis Sipiorski, from Southeastern Louisiana University, Associate Professor Gary LaFleur of Nicholls State University and Digital Photography Art instructor Daniel Kariko from Florida State University together with Assistant Curator Brook Greene of The Turchin Center for the Visual Arts. The Center can be contacted at turchincenter@appstate.edu or www.turchincenter.org.

Greene reported over eight hundred attended the exhibit with a few from Louisiana. Of the group of coordinators, only Sipiorski could not attend. “The experience was a good opportunity to visually inform the community of Boone, NC about the wetland loss in coastal Louisiana,” Cotten said.

The Nicholls State University publication of the 2007 Jubilee Anthology, “Jubilee: A Festival of the Arts & Humanities,” credits LUMCON’s Coastal Landscape Photography Course for all photographs featured in that publication, as they have done in the past. Course instructors include Dennis Sipiorski, Chair of the Art Department at Southeastern Louisiana University, and Dr. Gary LaFleur, Associate Professor of Biology at Nicholls State University. The course inspires students to investigate endangered environments of the Louisiana coast and aids in documenting the varied ecosystems through visual arts in particular photography.

Help LUMCON save our natural resources. Sign up at lumconnews@lumcon.edu to receive LUMCON News online.

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