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UT Research Foundation Awards Maturation Funding for Eight Inventions

Not all new technologies created by University of Tennessee researchers are ready for the marketplace. To help inventors get their products closer to licensing and commercialization, the UT Research Foundation awards grants each year through its annual maturation funding program.

This year, UT Research Foundation (UTRF) is awarding $120,000 to eight teams of inventors. Each team receives $15,000 to further develop their technology. UTRF is the not-for-profit organization responsible for commercializing and licensing technology discovered by faculty across the University of Tennessee System.

“UTRF is excited to provide maturation grants to further the development of these promising inventions. The quality and scope of the ideas submitted from across our campuses and institutes reflect the rich and diverse culture of research fostered by the University of Tennessee,” UTRF Interim President Dick Gourley said.

Since the maturation funding program began in 2007, more than $720,000 has been awarded to more than 50 projects.

Some of the projects have gone on to become high-tech startup companies. The founders of Nanophthalmics, a company started this year, received maturation funding in 2008 to help further develop tools for ocular microsurgery. Edward Chaum, Plough Foundation Professor of Retinal Diseases and director of Retina Service at the University of Tennessee Health Science Center Hamilton Eye Institute, and John Simpson in the Engineering Science and Technology Division at Oak Ridge National Laboratory, used the funding for ongoing research and development, the work of two medical students for two summers and equipment and supplies.

In 2010, the founder of 490 BioTech received funding to help move the technology to the product development stage and attract further funding through other small business-related resources. Gary Sayler, director of the Center for Environmental Biotechnology at UT Knoxville, founded 490 BioTech in 2011, and it is the only company that offers bioluminescent cell lines capable of continuously and autonomously producing light. The technology allows researchers to quickly tell which cells are alive, which are dead and what kind of effect treatments have on cells.

2012 recipients awarded by the UTRF Health Science Center office include:

•**Renukadevi Patil,** research assistant professor in pharmaceutical sciences, UT Health Science Center, for further development of novel compounds to treat cancer;
• **Monica M. Jablonski**, professor in ophthalmology, UT Health Science Center, for nanoparticles to provide extended release drug delivery in the eye for the treatment of glaucoma;
• **Yu Liu,** assistant professor in anatomy and neurobiology, and **Randall J. Nelson,** professor in anatomy and neurobiology, UT Health Science Center, for clinical trial support for a portable hand rehabilitation device;
• **Tayebeh Pourmotabbed**, professor in molecular sciences, UT Health Science Center, for further development of a novel DNAzyme as a new therapy to treat cancer.

2012 recipients awarded by the UTRF Multi-Disciplinary office include:

• **Jun Lin,** associate professor in animal science, UT Institute for Agriculture, for natural feed products to enhance the productivity and sustainability of food animals without the use of antibiotic growth promoters;
• **Karen Tobias**, professor in small animal clinical sciences, UT Institute for Agriculture, for a novel mechanical device to quickly secure bandages, dressings, or pressure wraps over large wounds;
• **Bonnie H. Ownley,** associate professor in entomology and plant pathology, **Nicole Labbé,** associate professor in forest products, **Kimberly Gwinn,** associate professor in entomology and plant pathology, **Doris D'Souza,** associate professor in food science and technology, and **Naima Moustaid-Moussa,** former professor, co-director of the University of Tennessee Obesity Research Center, UT Institute for Agriculture, for creating higher-value added products from biofuel production waste;
• **Darren Baker**, research assistant professor in the Center for Renewable Carbon, UT Institute for Agriculture, for a rapid method to fabricate commercial-quality carbon nanofibers from biomass.

The program was open to all University of Tennessee campuses and institutes. The selection process included evaluation of three key areas: (1) demonstration of a path for commercial development, (2) market potential, and (3) stage of development.

As part of the award process, UTRF will receive interim and final reports from the researchers that will describe increased knowledge and improvements in the subject technology. This information is expected to assist UTRF in better positioning the technologies for licensing.

A call for submissions for next year's Maturation Funding Program will be announced in October 2013. For more details on the program and past winners, visit **http://utrf.tennessee.edu/**.

In FY2012, UTRF helped establish nine startup companies and received 141 new invention disclosures.