

EMBL *etcetera*

Issue 50 • April 2009 • www.embl.org/newsletter

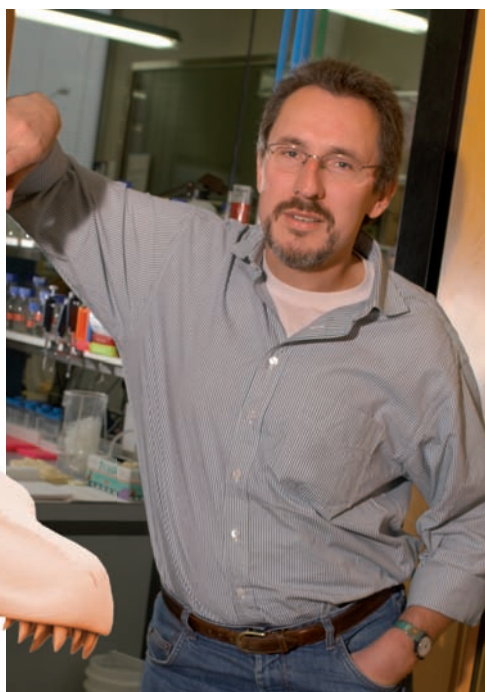
A new look all round

There's been some spring-cleaning going on! If you think EMBL*etcetera* looks a little different, wait till you see the new EMBL website, which will be online in May.

OIPA, IT and several external consultants have come up with a fresh, modern design for the EMBL site, figureheaded by a stylish new portal page and an immediately recognisable intranet, which is tailored according to the specific needs of each EMBL location. Parallel to the revamp, the site is now managed via a Content Management System, allowing easier update of the content.

See page 3 for more.

Monterotondo's movers, shakers and men of many talents



This issue takes a look at some of the news from Monterotondo, EMBL's Italian outstation and dedicated mouse biology unit, which will be celebrating its tenth anniversary later this year.

Outgoing deputy head of outstation Walter Witke (above left) talks about his early memories of Monterotondo and his new position at Bonn University (page 2); group leader Cornelius Gross (bottom right) steps into his shoes as Senior Scientist (page 2); and General Assistant Mark Carter (top right) lets us in to some secrets about how everything stays ship-shape (page 9)...

Climb the tree of life...

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First Monte GL takes his leave

Deputy head of EMBL Monterotondo Walter Witke has recently departed for pastures new after 13 years at the outstation. EMBL press officer Anna-Lynn Wegener talked to him in his new office at the University of Bonn...

what I'll miss most is the EMBL spirit; the internationality of the place, the informal exchange, flat hierarchies and the casual interaction.

What's also great about EMBL is that you have the freedom to choose the topic of your research, and so you can work on what interests you most. I hope I can bring some of that spirit to the University of Bonn where I am based now.

What does your new position entail?

I have taken up a professorship as head of the department of genetics in Bonn. That means that, apart from research, I'll teach genetics to undergraduate biology and medicine students.

Bonn is a great place to be right now, because the university is investing heavily in the life sciences and creating new institutes and networks for biology research. My goal

“What I'll miss most is the EMBL spirit; the internationality of the place, the informal exchange”

is to integrate this with the EMBL alumni network and maybe start some new collaborations.

What kind of research are you planning to do?

We will continue in the direction that we were already pursuing at EMBL Monterotondo. We're interested in the cytoskeleton, how it brings about cell movements and its role in different diseases.

Of course we will continue to work with mice, but we are also planning collaborations with the university clinic and institutes focussing on neurodegeneration and epilepsy to see if our findings are relevant for patients.

Will we see you back at EMBL some time in the future?

I'm sure I'll be back. My lab has an ongoing collaboration with Ernst Stelzer in Heidelberg to use the SPIM for 3D live imaging in mice, as well as several with colleagues at Monterotondo. We would like to study how specific organs form and function in the living mouse.

And, of course, I can't miss EMBL Monterotondo's anniversary in the summer!

Anniversary in June this year. What has changed over the past decade?

Monterotondo has grown and developed continuously. In the beginning there were only two groups: my lab and Klaus Rajewski's, with Ulrich Kalinke as Staff Scientist. Now Monterotondo has six groups and roughly 60 staff.

A lot has happened in terms of infrastructure and services, as well. A major development was when we got our own animal house, because in the beginning our mice were hosted by the European Mutant Mouse Archive on the same campus. Services like the phenotyping, histology and transgenic services and the monoclonal antibody and FACS facilities have also made the life of researchers a lot easier over time. I'm sure EMBL Monterotondo will continue to develop even further in future.

What are you going to miss most about EMBL?

The fantastic Italian coffee. But joking aside – and I know this is what everybody says –

Walter, tell us about your early memories of EMBL.

I started in 1996. In the beginning my group was 'squatting' at the main lab in Heidelberg, but the idea to establish a mouse biology unit was already in the pipeline. My lab was the first group that moved to the new Italian outstation when it was finished. I remember how on 26 January 1998 we drove from Heidelberg to Monterotondo with a massive truck filled with scientific equipment: microscopes, computers, freezers, centrifuges – you name it. While we were unloading, I'm sure our Italian colleagues thought we were completely nuts! That was how the mouse biology unit was born, and only three days later we ran the first gel in our new lab. Without the help of our neighbours at the Consiglio Nazionale delle Ricerche (CNR), things would have been very difficult.

Monterotondo is celebrating its 10th an-

Cornelius steps into Walter's shoes

Monterotondo group leader Cornelius Gross (right) will take on some of Walter's responsibilities in his new role as Senior Scientist. Since he joined EMBL in 2003, Cornelius' group's work has focussed on the neural circuits underlying anxiety behaviour in mice. "It will be very difficult to replace Walter's steady hand and experience, but Monterotondo is in an exciting phase with many new groups arriving, and I hope to facilitate this transition," says Cornelius.



Photo: Christine Panagiotidis



Left: EMBL staff member? Welcome to your new homepage! Middle: the www.embl.org gateway, the first port-of-call for visitors. Right: the home page for external users

If you go onto the web today...

...you're sure of a big surprise. Well, not today, perhaps, but after mid May, when the new EMBL web pages will be launched.

In a supreme and ongoing team effort, OIPA, IT and several external consultants have come up with a fresh, modern design for the EMBL site that also solves one of the problems of the old one – where am I?!

Parallel to the design revamp, the whole website is now managed via a Content Management System (CMS). “This allows easier update of the content, and in the long term it will allow an increase in the number of people being able to edit parts of the EMBL website,” explains Software Engineer Magda Wilczynska from IT Services.

The new-look intranet now has everything

that a staff member could need – the day's events, news, announcements, and quick links to downloads, the library and Ticket File Store, as well as all the externally available sections: About Us, Research, Services and Training. It sports a stylish grey livery so you always know at a glance whether you're in the internal pages.

External users, on the other hand, see a clean white design with links to the most important areas of the web for them; research, services, training, press releases and jobs, to name just a few. Everything is now found behind an attractive 'portal' page where visitors can choose their EMBL site.

“The changes have been implemented after a long process of consultation with a broad spectrum of users, including the outstations,”

says OIPA Web Designer Manuela Borchert. “Everything is still there, but with improved functionality, and it's tailored according to the needs of each EMBL site.”

The new website also includes some innovative features – the banners advertising conferences and other events can now include videos, for example – and the second phase of the project will herald more new features such as a multimedia gallery.

“For staff at EMBL, the intranet homepage for each outstation is designed to be an essential port-of-call at the start of the day,” says Manuela. “Everything you need is there.”

If you see any room for improvement or have any suggestions when the pages are live after mid May, contact support@embl.de.

When did you last climb a tree?

Now's your chance to relive your childhood during working hours with a clear conscience. EBI group leader Nick Goldman and PhD student Greg Jordan have been working as scientific advisors in a new project to develop an interactive tree of life.

The project, launched by the Wellcome Trust to celebrate the 200th birthday of Charles Darwin, provided the graphical centrepiece (pictured right) of a recent BBC documentary, narrated by Sir David Attenborough, about Darwin and evolution. Now the same interface has been made into an interactive download, so anybody can explore the diversity of life on Earth.

Nick and Greg worked closely with the graphic designers to supply the phylogenetic expertise behind the tool. “Watching how they integrated our understanding of evolutionary trees was a lot of fun,” says Greg. The interface uses the same rules as Greg's PhyloWidget (www.phylowidget.org), a web-based visualisation tool for drawing and displaying evolutionary trees. Unlike

many other programs, it uses a 'zoomable' interface which displays a constant global overview of the tree's shape and composition, and just like with real trees, you can 'walk' around it, grab a branch and explore, climbing as you go.

As they learn about speciation and divergence, users can also watch the accompanying section of the BBC documentary and

click to access more information – text, photos and links – relating to a species.

“We were really excited to be asked to consult on the project and to have the opportunity to bring the science of phylogenetic analysis to the public,” adds Greg.

To check it out, go to www.wellcometree-of-life.org/interactive ...and get climbing!



Right: The Tyrannosaurus rex branch of the tree, as seen on the BBC's documentary 'Charles Darwin and the Tree of Life'

What's in the pipeline?

Building Maintenance have several new projects on the go, not least of all a new building at EMBL Hamburg, catchily monikered '48e', which will contain the lab

and facilities for the EMBL PETRA-III synchrotron team. Head of department Rainer Menzel talked EMBL&cetera through some of the changes in store for Heidelberg, too...

Kindergarten refurbishment



The oldest part of the Kindergarten was originally the site management container when EMBL was built in 1974. This summer the building will be removed and the Kindergarten extended and modernised, including a permanent and safe link to the upper car park.

Extension



Levels 4 and 5 behind the main lab will be extended for the relocation of the IT server facilities.



Amphibian lake

It's Building Maintenance's policy – and the law – that when they build a new building, they also create an area devoted to nature to compensate. "We're making a lake for frogs, salamanders and other amphibians by the main car park," Rainer says. "It's going to be an oasis of peace, with benches for people to sit on."

Bus stop

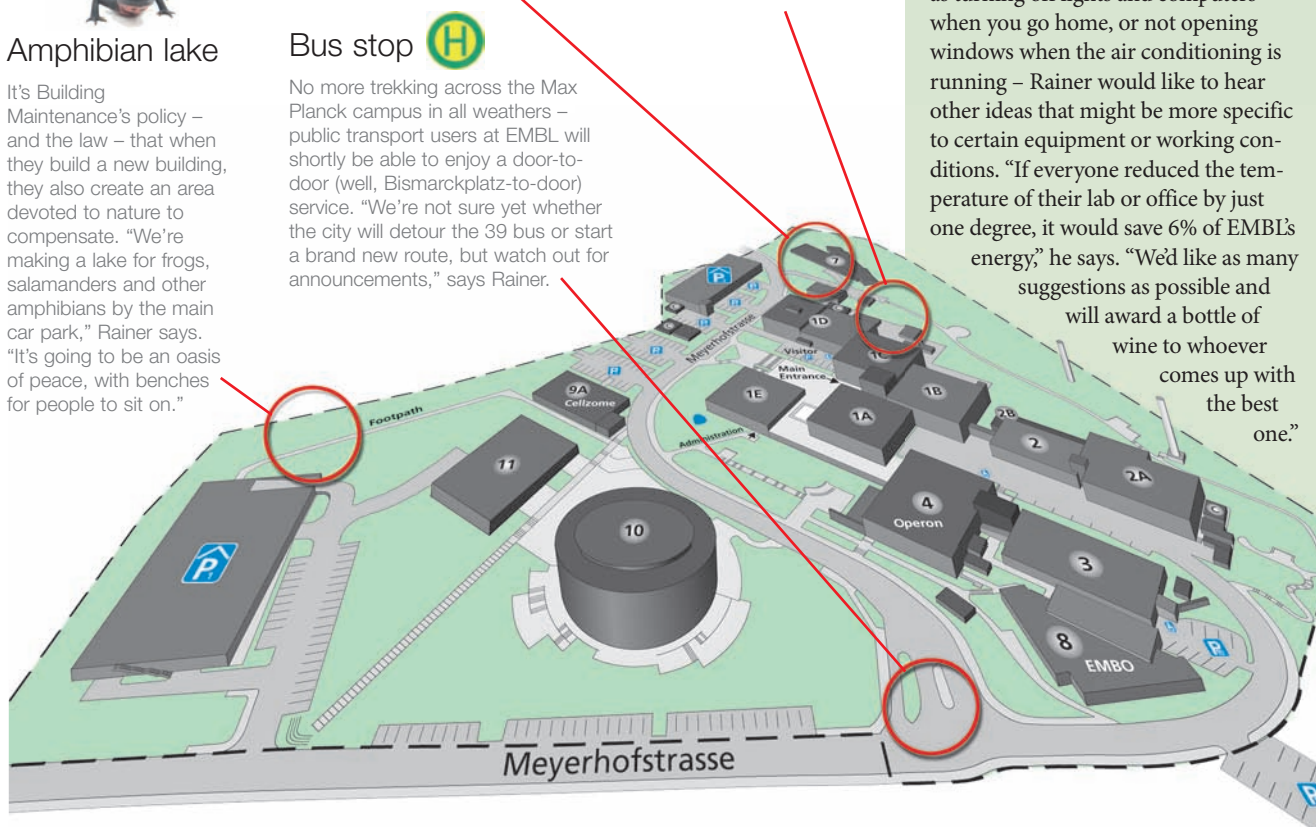
No more trekking across the Max Planck campus in all weathers – public transport users at EMBL will shortly be able to enjoy a door-to-door (well, Bismarckplatz-to-door) service. "We're not sure yet whether the city will detour the 39 bus or start a brand new route, but watch out for announcements," says Rainer.

Send in your tips!

To coincide with the start of a new Building Maintenance initiative to monitor and improve energy consumption at EMBL, Rainer Menzel would like to invite staff to contact him with energy-saving ideas.

"We want to build up a monitoring system to see where we need to make changes," explains Rainer. "We'll determine which buildings are the most wasteful and how we can make improvements."

While some things are obvious – such as turning off lights and computers when you go home, or not opening windows when the air conditioning is running – Rainer would like to hear other ideas that might be more specific to certain equipment or working conditions. "If everyone reduced the temperature of their lab or office by just one degree, it would save 6% of EMBL's energy," he says. "We'd like as many suggestions as possible and will award a bottle of wine to whoever comes up with the best one."



Round of retreats launched for predoc reps

The first regular 'retreat' for predoc representatives took place on 3-4 April in Hamburg, an initiative implemented by Dean of Graduate Studies Helke Hillebrand.

Representatives Nenad Bartonicek (EBI), Danielle Desravines (GR), Tim Wiegels (HH), Marco Faini and Benjamin Stauch (HD) and Serena de Fazio (MO) attended, alongside Helke and 'old hands' Claudia Chica and Judith Zaugg from Heidelberg

and EMBL-EBI respectively.

"I recognised the need for such a retreat as many of the issues being dealt with by the reps are the same at all EMBL sites, and we needed a forum for an exchange of ideas and solutions," says Helke. Other items on the agenda included the Predoc Wiki, Lab Day, TAC procedures, the PhD Symposium, the partner university scheme, mentoring and the Core Course.

"I'd like to thank Margret Fischer and Nathalie Thebaud for their hospitality at the Hamburg outpost, and also group leaders Paul Tucker and Victor Lamzin, who were kind enough to spend their Friday evening having dinner with all of us!" adds Helke.

The next retreat will be held in conjunction with the PhD Symposium in Heidelberg in October.

Partners on board

Valuable support for EMBL's scientific conferences, courses and other events is assured through the signing of six companies as partners in the EMBL Corporate Partnership Programme: Leica Microsystems, GE Healthcare, Perkin Elmer, Qiagen, Becton Dickinson and Eppendorf. With this, a number of prestigious and leading companies are taking part in the programme, and the Office of Resource Development is in negotiation with a number of further companies which, it is hoped, will also join soon.



courses, workshops and other events. To maximize the impact of the support, it is probable that 'attendance fellowships' could be set up to ensure that the events remain financially accessible to everyone.

But scientists needn't be concerned that fostering out some of the cost will negatively affect the quality of events; quite the opposite, in fact. "EMBL scientists will benefit from the companies' technical ex-

"Scientists will benefit from the companies' technical expertise and cutting-edge equipment"

The companies will support the new Advanced Training Centre and EMBL's mission to provide the best advanced training to scientists from all over the world, allowing EMBL to continue and build on its programme of top events in a world-class conference centre.

"It has always been EMBL's policy to run high-level conferences at realistic fees, and the financial support will be used to keep the registration costs at a reasonable level, even as the size and extent of the events increases," explains Jörg Fleckenstein, EMBL's Senior Manager of Resource Development.

The funds will be made available to the scientific organisers of conferences,

peritise and cutting-edge equipment. The ATC certainly won't become a commercial platform for advertisers," Jörg says.

It's a smart move for the companies, too; as well as the obvious benefits of association with the EMBL name and the audience of at least 5,000 attendees per year, other benefits they receive in return for their support includes an invitation to an annual round-table discussions with EMBL DG Iain Mattaj to share ideas, access to events and conference facilities and recognition on the ATC 'Wall of Honours'.

Not 50 every day



These two (above) both celebrated their half-century in 2009, but I'm sure you'll agree that Matthias looks the better for it. We don't know what Barbie got up to on 16 March, but Head of EMBL Hamburg Matthias Wilmanns celebrated his 50th birthday with a dinner party – a tasty oriental buffet and with plenty of beer and wine – at the DESY bistro. All the EMBL Hamburgers were invited to the evening, which kicked off with a birthday song on the piano by Barbara Tizzano (below), one of Matthias' students, and concluded with a surprise birthday cake with 50 candles for Matthias to extinguish. His birthday present was in true EMBL style; an etched crystal block with Matthias' 3D structure of the titin domains Z1Z2 in complex with telethonin. Happy Birthday!

- For another 50th celebration, see page 10.



Jargon-busting measures for Web Budget View

The finance department has been learning a new language to improve communication with EMBL scientists – plain English!

In the revamped accounting system, which launched on 1 April, the Web Budget View (the part that group leaders and other senior staff use to monitor their costs) has been made more user-friendly, both in functionality and by using 'non-accounting' language.

"We accountants tend to think in terms of 'variance' rather than 'difference', 'commit-

ments' rather than 'orders', and we use brackets where most people would use a minus sign," explains head of finance Keith Williamson. "Now that we've changed all this on the Web Budget View, we hope it will be more scientist-friendly and understandable."

The new system, codenamed 'Iceberg' and powered by SAP, also offers some new features to make budgeting easier for scientists. One major improvement, which will be introduced in the summer, is that the system

will allow a group leader to look into the future; it will forecast payable salaries right up until the end of a grant.

"The system allows for easier and more reliable planning," says Keith, who has recently been travelling around all the EMBL sites to introduce people to the system. "It also lets you see exactly what's being charged so you know that Finance isn't diddling you."

Feel free to contact Keith if you have any comments or suggestions about the system.

Science – guerrilla style



Left: the EBI's Duncan Legge holds the camera steady during one of the team's interviews

The queues outside the Cambridge Science Festival's 'Science on Saturday' event on 14 March barely noticed the wait as they enjoyed the on-the-spot activities provided by EBI and Wellcome Trust Sanger Institute scientists.

Usually safely ensconced in the popular Biology Zone, this year the volunteers went 'guerilla-style' to bring science and a smile to everyone waiting to explore the biology-themed attractions inside.

The queue-pleasing activities tied in to the festival's theme, Centuries of Science, by focussing on genomics. Visitors could 'Play Your Genomes Right', a fun activity based on an old TV quiz show, make DNA origami or compare genome sizes of a range of species such as *Drosophila* and mouse.

Another fun 'experiment' was a simple genetic profiling survey with which the team of volunteers found out the most common combination of traits possessed by the aver-

age science festival visitor. The 'trait wheel' categorised visitors based on five genetically-determined characteristics: 1) male/female, 2) whether their ear lobes hung free or were attached, 3) whether they could roll their tongue, 4) whether they had hair on the mid-digit part of their fingers; and 5) whether their hair (on their heads, not their fingers!) was straight or curly.

A 'voxpops' filming activity from last year was repeated with the help of TV producer Jonathan Sanderson. The team interviewed visitors about their thoughts on personal genome sequencing and what kind of genome research they'd like to see done in the future. The film will be made available soon at www.yourgenome.org.

Chris Stock, Sanger's Communication and Public Engagement Project Manager, and Louisa Wright, the EBI's Scientific Outreach Officer, would like to thank all the volunteers who did such a great job on the day.

A day in snapshots

On 12 March dozens of young people flocked to EMBL-EBI for the 7th EBI Open Day – formerly the Masters Open Day – to learn about life at the institute, its research, services and data resources, and the EMBL International PhD Programme. The EBI's Outreach and Training team would particularly like to thank Helke Hillebrand for representing the EIPP and all the outreach and training representatives who took time out to present and answer questions.

The next open day will be held on 3 November. As well as welcoming any bioinformatics masters students and their supervisors, the EBI would also like to extend an invitation to anyone wanting to know more about EBI activities. Register at www.ebi.ac.uk/training/openday.



Photos: Wellcome Trust Sanger Institute



Volunteers help kids (and their parents) to compare different genome sizes

Three generations of NMR at EMBL – and still going strong

There was much heartfelt handshaking and back-slapping at the official opening of the upgraded high-field NMR centre at EMBL Heidelberg on 13 March, as the tight and relatively small European NMR community came together for a day-long symposium.

Attendees included the ex-EMBL NMR group leaders – the Michaels Nilges and Sattler, Hartmut Oschkinat and Annalisa Pastore – as well as representatives from Bruker and the rector of Heidelberg University.

“It feels like a family reunion,” commented joint head of unit Christoph

Müller in his introductory speech, before going on to talk about the importance of NMR in EMBL’s drive towards a systems approach to biology. “This unit is living the concept of integrated structural biology,” he said. “It’s heartening to see young

scientists coming and embracing the principle of adopting complementary techniques.”

Other talks covered the recent advances of NMR in terms of technology and applications, and discussed its increasingly important role in structural biology.

“The day was a great success. The Operon was full till 7pm on a Friday evening,” commented Teresa Carlomagno, EMBL’s current NMR group leader. “The speakers demonstrated that modern NMR can really contribute much to the understanding of the most diverse biological processes.”



Wolfgang Bermel (Bruker BioSpin GmbH), Irmgard Sinning (Heidelberg University), Hartmut Oschkinat (FMP Berlin) and Ivano Bertini (CERM, Italy)

Photo: Pierandrea Temussi

The NMR alumni... Where are they now? What’s NMR like elsewhere? And what’s EMBL’s NMR story?

Cameron Mackereth

Then: postdoc, Sattler group, 2003-2007

Now: Group Leader, IECB, Pessac, France

“There were many changes with my move to start a group in France, besides the obvious switch from beer to wine. The spirit of the host institute was important: like EMBL, the IECB is an incubator for young group leaders, with a maximum length of stay and an international scientific advisory board. I’ve since also discovered that inclusion in one of the French national research agencies, such as CNRS or INSERM, facilitates collaboration and is required for most sources of national funding.

A recent change to accept applications and interviews in English has already made an important step towards welcoming an international contribution to the strong science community already in France.”



Annalisa Pastore

Then: Group Leader, 1988-1997

Now: Group Leader, NIMR, London

“When I first arrived at EMBL in 1988, I realised how many potential NMR projects were lying around – but with no spectrometer, I had to arrange NMR time downtown, in Milan and in Strasbourg through various friends and collaborations. Eventually I asked explicitly whether we could purchase a spectrometer, and Heads of Unit Steve Fuller and Dietrich Suck were very supportive. I stood up in front of SAC to justify the decision – and finally NMR was going to be introduced at EMBL! DG Lennart Philipson appointed two more group leaders in addition to myself: Hartmut Oschkinat, another experimentalist, and Michael Nilges as a computational person. You can imagine that it’s very rewarding for me to see that they are already at the third generation of NMR groups at EMBL.”



Fabian Filipp

Then: PhD student, Sattler group, 2001-2007

Now: postdoc, University of California, San Diego

“Leaving Heidelberg in 2007, I never had the chance to feel homesick in the international science hub San Diego. In summer 2008 it was the host city of the ICMRBS, one of the most important scientific events in biomolecular NMR, so that was a great opportunity to reconnect with old friends. We organised an NMR surfing workshop – which, just like NMR, involves hard work and waves! Having finished my postdoctoral project developing ¹³C based solid-state NMR methods to describe proteins in biomembranes, my advisor Stanley Opella has let me branch out and do some exploratory research. In a collaboration with Michael Burkart, I have begun a new project examining carrier protein guided lipid synthesis by NMR spectroscopy. Building such a pathway to independence is extremely important for young scientists and will provide the necessary preliminary data to secure research funding. Our department has a strong collaborative ideal that reminds me very much of the inspiring network during my time at EMBL.”



Don't sweat the paperwork

EMBL alumna Britta Schläger has two tips for anyone applying for an EC grant: prepare your proposal carefully, and get managerial help as early as you can.

Easier said than done? Look no further. Britta – the first research technician in the Hentze Group, who started at EMBL in 1989 – is celebrating the fifth anniversary of her company, kobris, which offers project management services, including the management of EC grants. “These pose an incredible amount of work for institute administrators and grant coordinators,” she explains.

Nobody knows this better than Phil Irving, Head of EMBL's Grants Services. She and her team provide managerial help ‘from cradle to grave’ to staff who are partners or coordinators of a grant, but

Having left the bench, Britta Schläger is offering project management services to the research community

sometimes it's advisable to seek additional managerial help for the time-consuming tasks involved. “This need not pose any financial restrictions on the scientific side, as many EC grants have a specific cost category for project management,” Britta says. Her company has successfully supported two projects at EMBL: the ‘E-STAR grant’ with Anne Ephrussi and Matthias Hentze and, at its final stage, the ‘symposi@embl grant’ with Peer Bork.

It may seem an unusual step after the responsibilities of a research technician, but Britta enjoys it. “I like organising and coordinating things, and a smooth-running project is simply fun,” she says. Of course, EMBL itself has changed a lot since



Britta's time, too. “When I started, letters were addressed to ‘Heidelberg, West Germany’. We shared one Mac (model II) between the whole group and read newspapers – this was before the internet conquered the world,” she recalls. “We needed three days to extract 100mg of DNA until Qiagen introduced the first plasmid kit!”

If you like more information or would like to contact Britta, visit www.kobris.de.



Good guy mossies

EMBL alumni George Christophides and his colleagues at Imperial College London have made a major breakthrough in malaria research by discovering how mosquitoes' immune systems fight off the parasites.

“Far from being the ‘bad guys’, mosquitoes are unwilling carriers of the disease,” says George (above), who was a Staff Scientist in the Kafatos group until 2005. “Now we need to find out how a small number of parasites manage to evade detection while the immune system is fighting, and go on to re-infect humans during the mosquito's next meal.”

If the researchers can bolster the mosquito's defences to eliminate all the parasite, the discovery could help find a way to block transmission of the disease to humans.

An excuse to Facebook!

To help track down its alumni and extend the community beyond the existing chapters, the Alumni Association has decided to employ the latest in Web 2.0 technology – the social networking sites.

“Many alumni use these sites to keep in touch with their ex-colleagues,” says Mehrnoosh Rayner, responsible for Alumni relations at EMBL. “They're an incredibly useful way to track down alumni, and we already have 38 members on Facebook and 94 on LinkedIn.”

The official website remains, as always, www.embl.org/alumni, with 1,500 members, but the association has also joined Twitter and XING, two emerging networking sites. “We're curious to see how these groups will grow, as they attract very different user types,” says Mehrnoosh.

“We're currently exploring ways to use the services on the sites, like discussion boards, announcements and open reference letters,” adds Alumni Association board member Anastasios Koutsos. “We hope to have a plan within the next few months, and any ideas are welcome.”

In the meantime, search for ‘EMBL Alumni’ to join the groups at any of the sites.

Please mark your diaries:

- **11 May 2009:** Alumni Association Board meeting. If you have any issues you would like the Board to consider, e-mail alumni@embl.org by 24 April.
- **Mid June 2009:** Local Chapter meeting in Dilofo, Greece. Organiser: Anastasia Politou (adakevri@yahoo.gr).
- **18 June 2008:** John Kendrew Award Ceremony, EMBL Lab Day.
- **11 July 2009:** German Local Chapter meeting in collaboration with EMBL summer party, Heidelberg.
- **11 September 2009:** Deadline for John Kendrew Young Scientist Award 2010: www.embl.org/aboutus/alumni/careers_awards/index.html#kendrew.
- **12-14 March 2010:** Alumni Reunion 2010.

We want to hear from you! Tell us about your personal or scientific achievements, an interesting event in which you are involved or give us feedback on alumni matters at alumni@embl.org.

PCUBE: a platform for cutting-edge protein production methods

A new EU Framework 7 programme will bring state-of-the-art protein preparation techniques – some developed by EMBL scientists – to structural biologists in Europe.

PCUBE, an international effort involving groups from EMBLs Heidelberg, Grenoble and Hamburg structural biology units, as well as researchers in Oxford and Zürich, started on 1 April this year and will run for four years. Although EMBL isn't coordinating the programme, its scientists and the unique technologies they have developed are playing a major role. These include Darren Hart's ESPRIT system for finding solu-

ble protein fragments and Imre Berger's protein expression systems, notably in insect cells, both at EMBL Grenoble; the high-throughput crystallisation facilities headed by Jochen Müller-Dieckmann (HH) and José Márquez (GR), and an advanced light microscopy labelling platform at EMBL Heidelberg, headed by Christoph Müller.

PCUBE will broaden access to the protein production techniques needed for modern-day structural biology by funding the resources needed to make them widely accessible to external users, who will also be able to learn from the expertise of the labs

that run the techniques. A third aim of PCUBE will be joint research activities between the groups, aiming to develop new methods to improve the capacity, throughput and robustness of the platforms. Together, these goals will help European researchers tackle the formidable challenges presented by 21st century structural biology.

"This kind of model has already been very successful in providing access to synchrotrons and other large instruments," says Darren. "It will empower young scientists by allowing access to these new technologies and methods."

Serendipity in life (and) science

EMBL alumnus Christian Mellwig was determined that, whatever path he took in life, it wouldn't be teaching...

"My father was a teacher," explains Christian, who for the past six years has taught chemistry, mathematics and bioinformatics at the Marie Baum Schule in Heidelberg. "When I was a kid, he would come home all the time with terrible stories about what had happened in his classes. I'd think, how can he enjoy his job?"

"It's not that I didn't have a good time at school myself; I did like the chemistry and maths classes, because the teachers I had at that time were very motivated. But throughout my childhood and teenage years I swore I would never become a teacher."

But while Christian was doing his PhD in the Böttcher group at EMBL Heidelberg, he got involved as a *Hilfswissenschaftler* at the university, someone who helps organise and supervise the practical work of students. "I found that I really enjoyed explaining things and helping people," he says. "I'd never had a problem talking in front of people, but I started to discover that I really actually enjoyed teaching!"

"At the same time, I realised that a major part of being a group leader consists of writing grant applications and doing a lot of admin, and I couldn't imagine enjoying that kind of job. It was also very difficult for a chemist to find a position: many friends



Christian in the classroom

"They didn't expect scientists to be like everyday people, with hobbies and other interests!"

from university had finished their PhDs and couldn't find jobs. So I decided teaching could really be an alternative."

It was turned out to be the right decision for Christian, but not without its hurdles. "One of the biggest challenges is to motivate the students in scientific subjects," he says. "They often tell me that their parents don't mind if they have problems in these subjects, because they had the same problems themselves."

The Marie Baum Schule, though, has a sterling success rate for turning out scientists. "Roughly half of our students choose a science career, mainly in biology, medicine,

chemistry or molecular biology," says Christian. "It's a fantastic starting point for university, and they're interesting candidates for a range of companies."

"From time to time former students tell me that the notes they made during my lessons are very useful and they still use them at university. They also send me e-mails when they have problems in chemistry!" And sometimes, they make Christian proud: "Recently, I got an email from an overjoyed student who had received one of only 23 positions at the German Cancer Research Centre (DKFZ) – out of 2,000 applicants!"

Despite the success rate, though, Christian has several ideas about how science teaching in schools can be improved. "I think it's important for children to meet 'real' scientists and talk to them," he says. "Some of my students visited EMBL, and they were very surprised, because they didn't expect scientists to be like everyday people, with hobbies and other interests!"



Suggestions for Lab Day, please!

Here's a date for your diaries: Lab Day, EMBL's annual get-together for staff from all sites, will be held on 18 June. It's a great opportunity to meet colleagues you don't see very often, hear about other peoples' science and enjoy a poster session, ceremonies in the Operon, food, music and a late-night party.

New for this year, though, the organisers would like to try something different for the morning science sessions. "We would like to use this time to host small, focussed research meetings, taking advantage of the fact that people will be at Heidelberg from all outstations," says Eileen Furlong, who, together with EMBL Grenoble's Ramesh Pillai and Alvis Brazma from the EBI, is planning the day. "We're soliciting ideas and volunteers for activities on the morning of Lab Day. These could include discussion groups or short seminars on a given research topic."

Activities so far include two hour mini-

symposia on RNA and human variation, two discussion groups on Solexa issues and what chemistry can do for biology and a training course on chemoinformatics. If you have any more suggestions, please contact Eileen, Alvis or Ramesh.

As in previous years, Lab Day will be preceded by Career Options Day on 17 June, during which pre-and postdocs will hear about alternative, non-academic career opportunities from a variety of professionals. Organised jointly by EICAT and EMBLEM, the programme will cover business development, research in industry, HR management and patenting, and in addition to the talks, small group sessions over lunch will allow attendees to discuss further details with the speakers.

The day after Lab Day, EMBLEM will be celebrating their 10th anniversary in the EMBL canteen from 7pm, and everyone is invited to join them.

Finnishing school

A group of 41 Finnish biochemistry and biotechnology students from the Institute of Medical Technology in Tampere spent a day at EMBL Heidelberg on 12 March in a visit initiated by Aino Jaervelin, who spent time as a trainee at EMBL last year. "I knew as

soon as I came here that EMBL would be a really exciting place for my fellow students to see," says Aino, who spent May to September in the Bork group.

The visitors, a mix of first and second year students who hadn't much experience in a lab yet and older ones who were already working in research groups, were intro-



All smiles: the Finnish visitors

Bork to the future



For most people, it's important to keep in touch with former supervisors and lab mates, especially those with whom you spend the early years of your scientific career. Social networking sites and e-mail help, of course, but if you were in Peer Bork's group, you can also enjoy a regular get-together organised specifically for his alumni.

"People have diverged into so many different areas, and a get-together like this offers a really useful and lively platform for exchange – a bit like a big group meeting," says Bork alumnus and new EMBL group leader Jan Korbelt who, together with Peer, Roland Krause and Francesca Ciccarelli (pictured above, with Miguel Andrade), organised this year's 6-8 March event in Heidelberg. Fifteen alumni met for a weekend of meals in town and at Peer's house, presentations and discussions about their work, and even an Altstadt stroll with current group members.

"The first such event was in 2006, but this time everyone agreed it should happen at least every other year," says Jan. "The group has many alumni who are already at group leader or professor level."

The four organisers have also been busy planning their next EMBO World Practical Course, which will be held in Shanghai this year. "We hope we have more luck with the weather this time," quips Jan. "At the 2007 course in Cancun, Mexico, Hurricane Dean arrived an hour before the meeting was supposed to start!"

duced EMBL and its PhD Programme and heard talks by group leaders John Briggs and Marko Kaksonen, EMBL's Finnish member of faculty. They also looked around some labs and found out about working abroad from Personnel's own Finn, Laura Minnich.

Aino, who enlisted the help of her friend Elina Ojala to help organise the visit, has now been accepted onto the EMBL PhD programme.

Grenoble library gets a makeover



EMBL Grenoble's library is set to be a contender in "France's Next Top Library" next season as it launches its new look. Administrative Officer Mary Jane Villot and the Szilárd Library's Anne Barkworth spent many hours cataloguing the old stock and paring it down for a clean, spacious feel. "Everything is still available, but there was no need to have so

much old stuff out on the shelves," says Mary Jane. "Now we have the up-to-date books and periodicals to hand, as well as a 'chill-out' seating and waiting area with leather sofas."

The new-look library will also act as a showcase for artwork and photography by staff in a regularly changing exhibition. Some of the first masterpieces on show were Head of outstation Stephen Cusack's magnificent photos taken in Namibia (above).



behindthescenes

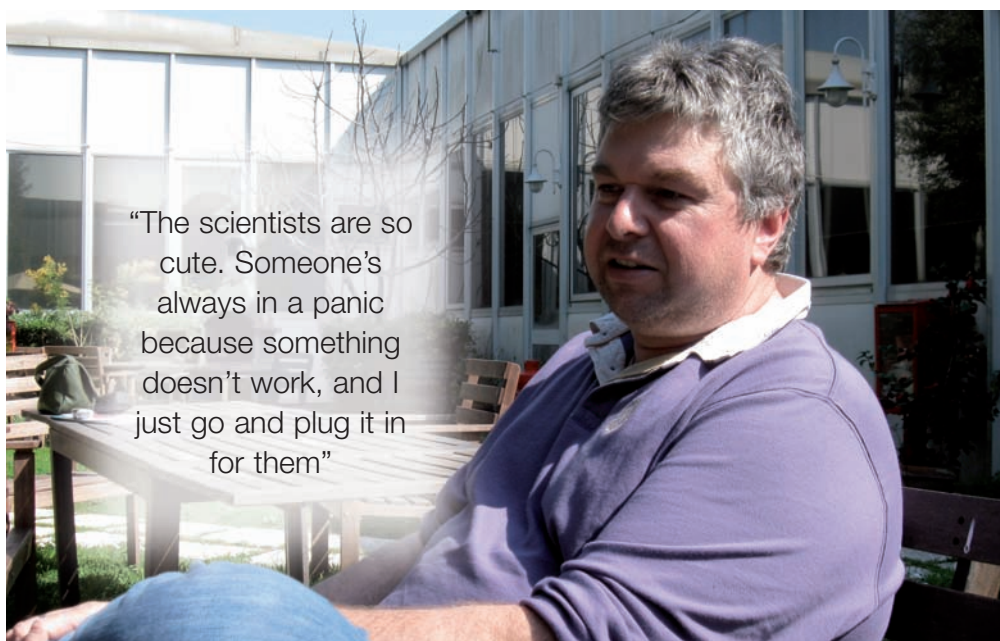
Monterotondo's gentle giant

Towering above the general populus at EMBL's Italian outstation, Mark Carter is always on hand – especially if you need something getting down from a high shelf. "That's all I do," he jokes. "I don't know how they'd manage without me!"

Height aside, you still couldn't miss Mark, Monterotondo's General Assistant. Even after eight years in Italy, he sounds like a true Brummie (a resident of Birmingham) – and he's the one to whom all staff turn when something needs fixing. "What do I do? It's a long list. Kitchen services, cleaning glassware, sterilising, dealing with chemical and radioactive waste, driving to Rome, driving back from Rome, helping Flavio (Zizzo, Purchase Officer) with the deliveries, finding space for new equipment – no two days are the same," says Mark.

He first came to Monterotondo with his scientist wife in 2001; she was joining the animal house, but Mark had no job to go to. "I like to keep busy, so I started to go a bit crazy," he says. "Then Walter (Witke) needed some equipment fixing, so I offered to take a look at it – and then he gave me something else, and it went on from there. I've always been a jack-of-all-trades, and I fit perfectly here. I'm never bored."

Mark never knows what he'll have to turn his hand to. "When we had the new mouse house, Nadia brought some new cages from the US which were about €40,000 each. There was no way of getting them off the lorry until someone said: 'oh, get Mark, he'll



"The scientists are so cute. Someone's always in a panic because something doesn't work, and I just go and plug it in for them"

be able to drive a forklift truck," he recalls. "Well, I'd driven one about once before in my life! I'd only been here for two weeks – and the very first cage that I lifted off went crashing to the ground. I had to go and tell Nadia. I thought, oh no, my career's over!"

It wasn't, of course, and since then he's amazed at what he has seen and learnt working at EMBL. "I've never worked in this kind of environment before, and I'm always amazed at how intelligent the people are," he says. "A few weeks ago someone showed me some heart cells on a dish that were beating, and I was thinking, how on earth have things come this far?"

"Having said that, though, intelligence doesn't necessarily mean common sense. The scientists are so cute. Someone's always

in a panic because something doesn't work, and I just go and plug it in for them! But I do the job because of the people, really. They're great."

There are aspects that Mark isn't so keen on. "You take your life into your hands getting to work in the morning," he says. "The Italians are amazingly blasé about traffic accidents. Every holiday weekend 40 or 50 people will be killed, but the media just says 'that's better than last year!' People believe that when your number's up, it's up."

"But Rome is amazing. After 8 years I still discover something new around every corner. My only complaint – surprisingly perhaps – is the food. You get more variety in Birmingham. Here, you can have whatever you want as long as it's pasta!"



Happy birthday, EMBL&cetera!

As the newsletter celebrates its 50th issue, we take a look back at its conception, birth and first days at school...

OK, so unlike Matthias and Barbie (page 5), EMBL&cetera isn't exactly 50 years of age, but this issue is the fiftieth – and what better time for a revamp?

We've caught up with Hollywood at last to present the newsletter in 'glorious technicolor' and sporting the first dramatic redesign since the halfway point, issue 25. With new fonts, more white space and a jazzy new layout, we hope that EMBL&cetera will fly off the shelves even faster every press day!

But how did the idea of having an EMBL newsletter first come about? Russ Hodge, the first member of the Office of Informa-

"We wanted a name that would cover a broad range of topics relating to the lab, so EMBL&cetera worked quite well"

tion and Public Affairs, was one of its founders.

"When I started at EMBL in 1997, the only way of communicating news was by word-of-mouth or at council meetings," recalls Russ, who's now a science writer at the Max Delbrück Center for Molecular Medicine in Berlin. "We also wanted a way to keep alumni informed about the lab."

At that time the department comprised Russ and Volker Wiersdorff, who now manages publications at EMBO, and they were already busy with the Annual Report, press releases and much more. It was then that Sarah Sherwood, who would go on to edit the newsletter until its 27th issue six years

later, was brought on board. "We had to come up with everything from scratch – the type of content, the layout, even the name," she says. "We wanted to call it something that would cover a very broad range of topics relating to life at the lab, so EMBL&cetera worked quite well – and we were awfully fond of alliterations."

"Lots of people mistakenly pronounce it 'ec-cetera' so we made sure you could actually see the 't' in the ampersand. Nerdy design details, but it was fun."

The first issue came out in July 1999. It had eight pages, and stories covered the opening of the Monterotondo outstation, Regina Herhoff and David Westley coming to work at the Szilárd Library at EMBL Heidelberg and the construction of the new Kindergarten. "There was no particular formula for the first few issues," says

Russ. "It was as long or as short as we wanted to make it, and there was no fixed bimonthly schedule like today. The job of editor was, and still is, a tricky balancing act between producing something interesting and enter-

taining and remaining sensitive to the political issues behind the scenes."

"People cottoned on quickly to contributing ideas and stories, and it took off pretty much by itself," says Sarah. "One thing that I soon started to appreciate was the insight into the lab that working on it gave us. At the time, there weren't many people at EMBL who really had their hand on the pulse of what was going on in the different areas of the lab. We were really privileged to receive information from the community and then put it back out there for them."

Russ and Sarah are both alumni now – Sarah works in Communications and External Relations at IRB in Barcelona – but they're taking a keen interest in the newsletter's evolution, as well as keeping abreast of changes at EMBL. "Reading EMBL&cetera now is like poking your head into an open window at the lab," says Sarah.

Goodies get cool

These snazzy new EMBL memory sticks (below) are the latest addition to the lab's range of branded items. At €5 each, you can buy them from OIPA – contact michel@embl.de or come to V324 at EMBL Heidelberg. There's also a new range of T-shirts, polo shirts, hooded tops and caps, including – at last – women's fitted T-shirts!



www.embl.de/shop

Registration is now open for the following **EBI hands-on bioinformatics training course**, aimed at helping researchers to get to grips with their data: Interactions, Pathways and Networks (15-18 June; registration closes 18 May). See www.ebi.ac.uk/training/handson for programme details and to register.

Want to do something to help science education and see your name published online? The *Science in School* team is always looking for people to **translate the articles** in the European journal for science teachers – and it can be fun, too! With several EMBL staff members, predocs and postdocs already contributing, some of the articles are even about the science that's being done here. If you're interested in translating or even writing articles, check out the website, www.scienceinschool.org, or contact editor@scienceinschool.org.

On 31 March five young winners from the **GEN-AU (Austrian Genome Research Programme) Summer School and 'Jugend forscht' Rheinland-Pfalz** enjoyed a visit to EMBL Heidelberg, including a visit to the fish facility and a DNA extraction experiment. The two youth research competitions, one national and the other regional, allow students the opportunity to be part of real research with a series of visits and practicals.

On 30 March **Professor Richard Larkins AO**, Vice-chancellor and

President of Monash University in Australia, visited EMBL Heidelberg to meet EMBL DG Iain Mattaj and Head of Monterotondo Nadia Rosenthal in preparation for taking up office as the first chair of EMBL Australia in July this year. AO stands for Officer of the Order of Australia, a title Professor Larkins was awarded in 2002 for service to medicine and health.

The Szilárd Library at EMBL Heidelberg will run a **Web of Science and Endnote Web training course** on the afternoon of 11 May. If you're interested in attending, please contact library@embl.de.

Upcoming free courses in the EMBL Non-Scientific Training and Development Programme include:

Course	Date / site
Minute taking with confidence	22 April (MO)
Time Management	6 May (EBI)
How to be a successful interviewee	13 May (GR)
Effective Writing	14 May (GR)
Access Intermediate	20 May (HD)
Leading your Project	26 May (HH)
Managing risk & quality in projects	27 May (HH)
121 Advanced Presentation Skills	8-9 June (HD)
Excel Beginners	9-10 June (HD)
Effective Writing	15 June (EBI)

Visit www.embl.org/nonscientifictraining for more details.



Music, maestro

25 year-old Russian piano virtuoso Nikolai Tokarew treated an audience of 320 people to pieces by Rameau, Tchaikovsky, Mussorgsky, Ravel, Rosenblatt, Liszt and Debussy in his sell-out Heidelberger Frühling recital on 16 April. Organiser Klaus Scheffzek would like to thank everyone involved, including the sponsors and Building Maintenance, who greatly contributed to maintaining the perfect 'atmosphere' for the music in the packed Opern.

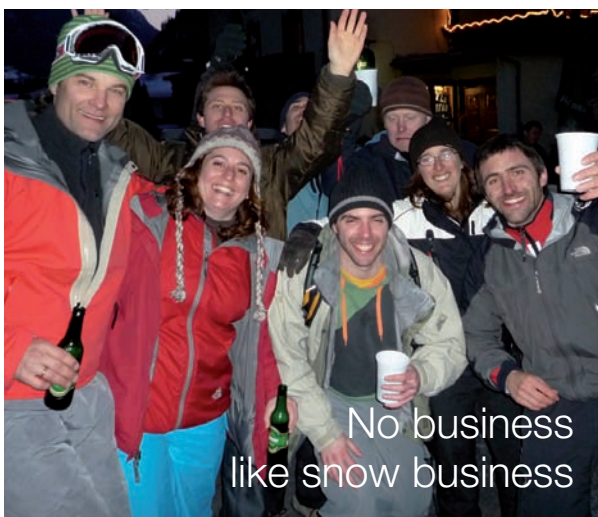
fromtheStaffAssociation

News from the Staff Association General Assemblies in March and April:

- After a comprehensive Council review of the Rules and Regulations in 2008, in which the Staff Association, together with Administration, were intensely involved, the following mostly positive changes were made: availability and limit of the Education Grant increased; Saturday now counts as overtime; time limits for installation grants unified to 2 years; retirement age raised to 68 in exceptional cases; notice period for contract renewal raised to 6 months; period of limitation (similar to a statute of limitations) created set to 2 years.
- The Staff Association committee members were thanked for their work during what was an unusually busy 2008. The association itself would like to thank the 18 clubs who made EMBL Heidelberg's Clubs Fair following the AGM on 3 April a success.
- If you were unable to attend the AGM, contact one of your Staff Association representatives for more information.

2009 Events (Heidelberg): 11 July: EMBL Summer Party. 17 October: Beer Festival.

The Staff Association covers all categories of staff and has representatives at all out-stations. Keep up-to-date with events at www.embl-heidelberg.de/~staff (site for EMBL pensioners: www.embl-heidelberg.de/~staff/pensioners). – Catherine Floyd



No business like snow business

Left to right: Ski instructor Philipp Heindl joins snow fans Nonia Pariente, Marco Faini, Oriol Gallego, Sebastian Glatt, Matthew Betts, Kat Brown and Andrea Pocco for some après-ski at the playground of the rich and famous, See/Ischgl, in Austria at this year's EMBL ski trip on 19-22 March. As in previous years, Matthew will be putting together a souvenir 'movie' of the trip for all to enjoy, so if you have any videos you'd like him to include, please send them to betts@embl.de.

24 April EMBL Heidelberg
Flea Market for children's clothes, toys, books and equipment

27-29 April EMBL-EBI
Course: Programmatic Access to Biological Databases. EMBL-EBI Outreach & Training Team

30 April EMBL Monterotondo
EMBL Distinguished Visitor Lecture: Grid cells and the entorhinal-hippocampal network for spatial representation. Edvard Moser, Medisinsk teknisk forskningscenter, Norway

4-6 May EMBL Heidelberg
Course: The joint EMBL/Affymetrix workshop on whole transcript microarray data analysis. V. Benes

8 May EMBL Monterotondo
EMBL Distinguished Visitor Lecture: Deconstructing metastasis. Joan Massague, Cancer Center at Memorial Sloan-Kettering Institute, NY

11-15 May EMBL-EBI
Course: A Walk Through EBI Bioinformatics Resources. EMBL-EBI Outreach & Training Team

13-17 May EMBL Heidelberg
Conference: EMBO Conference Series on Chromatin and Epigenetics

18-20 May EMBL Heidelberg
Conference: Fifth Annual BioMalPar Conference on the Biology and Pathology of the Malaria Parasite

18-23 May EMBL Heidelberg
Course: EMBO Practical Course on Fluorescence (Cross-) Correlation Spectroscopy (FCS/FCCS) for Cell Biology Applications

22 May EMBL Monterotondo
EMBL Distinguished Visitor Lecture: Dissecting tumour suppressor gene networks *in vivo*. Scott Lowe, CSHL

8-10 June EMBL Heidelberg
Course: Analysis of Short Read Sequencing Data. V. Benes

For more details about these events and more, visit www.embl.org/events



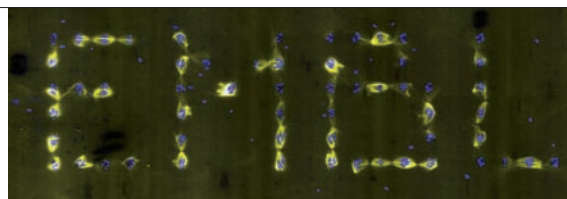
Jacqueline Dreyer, EMBL Heidelberg's new Scientific Training Officer, will establish a new series of courses and workshops alongside EMBL's corporate partners. Half-German and half-Mozambiquan, Jacqueline grew up in Portugal, studied biotechnology and molecular biology in Mannheim and Bochum and then worked for a French healthcare consulting firm in Paris and Cologne before coming to EMBL. Her only problem now, she says, is deciding which of EMBL's clubs she can live without: "I want to join them all!" she says.

Brenda Stride will return to EMBL Heidelberg on 1 May this year in the newly created role of Postdoctoral Programme Administrator. Brenda will be a familiar face to some, as she did a postdoc at EMBL from 2005 to 2007 in the group of former EMBO Director Frank Gannon. Originally from Canada, she has since been working as a scientist at the pharmaceutical company Phenex in Ludwigshafen. "I'm really looking forward to being back at EMBL, and to help make the postdoctoral programme a valuable resource for EMBL postdocs," says Brenda.



With the departure of Thomas Franz to the Max Planck Institute for the Biology of Ageing in Cologne, Gene Expression unit team leader **Jeroen Krijgsveld** took over the running of the Proteomics Core facility from 1 April this year. The facility is now located in rooms V215 and V216 at EMBL Heidelberg.

Right: 'EMBL' written with mitotic spindles, courtesy of the Nédélec group. "The pattern of chromatin beads was enclosed in a microchamber and filled with *Xenopus* egg extracts providing all the necessary elements for spindle assembly," says Research Technician Celine Pugieux. "The image was taken using a confocal microscope, to visualise fluorescent tubulin and Hoechst dye." If you'd like to have your favourite word in chromatin for a modest fee, contact her or François Nédélec.



awards&honours

Johan Hattne, a former predoc in Victor Lamzin's group at EMBL Hamburg, has received the prestigious Max-von-Laue prize from the German Society for Crystallography for his outstanding PhD work, during which he developed a pattern recognition-based method for the automated location and modelling of DNA and RNA molecules in electron-density maps. Johan, who defended his PhD in October 2008 and has since taken up a postdoctoral position at Southwestern University, Dallas, was awarded his prize at the society's annual meeting in Hannover on 9-13 March.

Mayka Sanchez, a postdoc in Matthias Hentze's lab at EMBL Heidelberg, has been awarded the Josep M. Sala Trepat Prize from the Catalan Society of Biology. The prize is awarded to a young researcher from Spain or Portugal for studies in gene regulation performed abroad. Mayka will receive her prize on 24 April at the Institut d'Estudis Catalans in Barcelona.

Developmental Biology Unit group leader **Stefano de Renzis** has received a Career Development Award from the Human Frontier Science Program for his project, "Transcriptional control of protein and membrane trafficking during tissue morphogenesis".

