

# Zebra fish project gets new center

■ An International Resource Center will be built in Eugene to accommodate growing research demands

By Ben Romano  
Oregon Daily Emerald

In 1980, the late Professor George Streisinger completed the first cloning of a vertebrate.

He cloned a small zebra fish at the University and his work started a tradition of biomedical research that still continues today.

Five years ago the biomedical research community as a whole decided there was a need for a center to house the rapidly growing number of various strains of living zebra fish and their genes.

That need is being met by the construction of a zebra fish International Resource Center in Eugene, scheduled to be completed in summer of 2000.

The research community also saw a need for a system to catalog and make information available about the research being done, said Monte Westerfield, a member of the University Institute of Neuroscience. Westerfield is also the principal investigator responsible for raising over \$9 million in grants and donations needed for the center.

Ten to 15 years ago, the only zebra fish research laboratories in the world were located at the University, Westerfield said. Since then, research has spread to 120 labs in more than 30 countries. The majority of the research done with the dark blue and silver fish surrounds genetics.

"There are now somewhere between 8,000 and 10,000 different zebra fish genetic mutations," Westerfield said. "This is a tremendous resource for research,

but the problem is it's spread out all over the world."

The new resource center and database will solve this problem. Scientists around the world will be able to access an on-line database to find existing research and what mutations have already been discovered. The center will also be equipped to ship and receive samples. This will greatly increase the productivity of the research community, Westerfield said.

The Computer and Information Sciences and Biology departments are working together to set up the database. The project is in the new field of bioinformatics, which is the study of information about biological systems, Westerfield said.

The benefits of zebra fish research are many, Westerfield said. Treatments and preventions of certain developmental heart and brain disorders have come from zebra fish research, he said.

"Several mutations in zebra fish have been identified that serve as models for human diseases," Westerfield said.

Comparing zebra fish embryos with human embryos is easy to do because of their remarkable similarity, said Thomas Dyke, University vice provost for research.

"The genome is well conserved between zebra fish and man," Dyke said. "We can learn a lot about human development through zebra fish development in ways you can't study humans for ethical and practical reasons."

The majority of the money required for the construction and staffing of the 10,000-square-foot center came in the form of grants from the National Institutes of Health. The University also generated additional funds by selling state bonds. From the University's perspective, the center will be

## Zebra fish research at the University

From the first vertebrate cloning to an international resource center these tiny fish have played a big role in biomedical research.

**1970** Zebra fish research started by Professor George Streisinger.

**1980** First cloning of a vertebrate anywhere was a zebra fish by George Streisinger.

**1985** Streisinger dies but zebra fish research continues by Charles Kimmel and Monte Westerfield who were working on zebra fish at the time. In subsequent years professors Judith Eisen, John Postlethait and Jim Weston established labs.

**1990** Very well known scientists started working on zebra fish research world wide.

**1995** By this time many mutations had been discovered and the need for a resource center was apparent.

**1998** NIH funded the zebra fish geno initiative. A follow up to the human geno project, which discovered the sequence of human genes, the zebra fish initiative will be used by scientists to discover the function of genes.

**1999** Construction begins on the new Zebra Fish International Resource Center.

**2000** Scheduled completion of the center.

SOURCE: Monte Westerfield

Katie Nesse Emerald

a separate entity, Westerfield said.

"We're recognized as national and international leaders in zebra fish research," Dyke said. "It's a very wonderful thing for both students and faculty."

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