

OSU poultry scientist James Hermes talks with people after his Science Pub Corvallis talk on chickens and eggs at Old World Deli

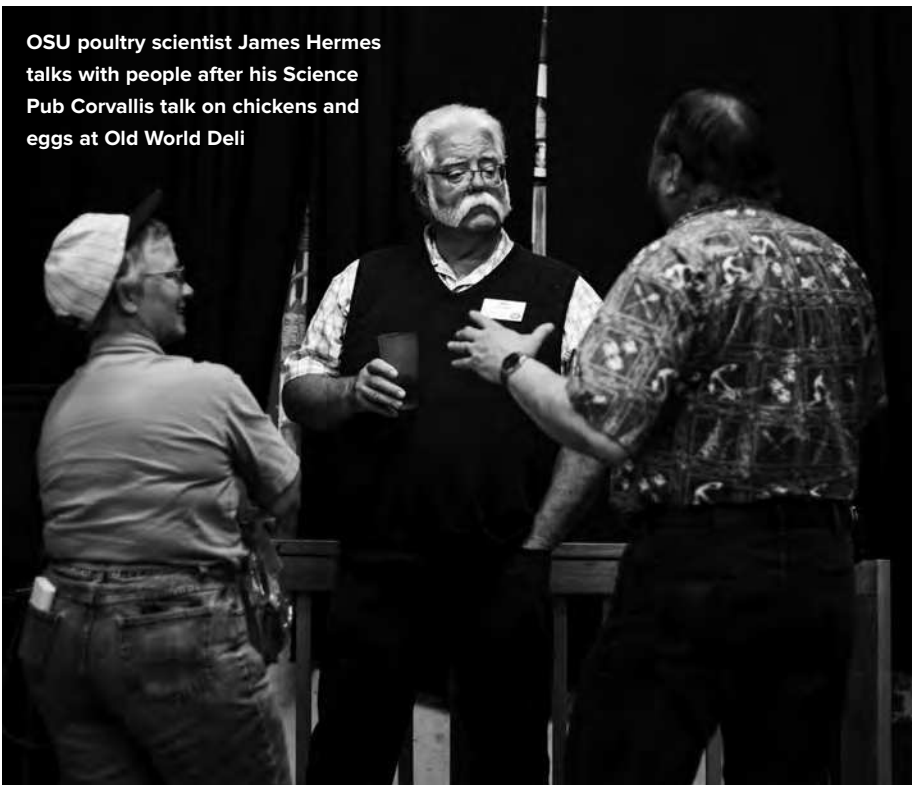


PHOTO BY JENSEN OCAMPO

UO, for example, is beginning construction on the Phil and Penny Knight Campus for Accelerating Scientific Impact, thanks to a \$500 million gift. The space and support for new faculty will help propel UO into the top 100 universities in the country, as measured by federal funding. David Conover, UO VP for research and innovation, told a campus audience in January. “Money itself is not the goal,” Conover said. “It’s what we do with it.”

A component of the fledgling Knight Campus community outreach is — of course — public lectures (without the food and drink). “Science is not the be-all and end-all answer to itself,” said David McCormick, the director of the Institute of Neuroscience, in a UO news release previewing his “Mind, Brain, and Reality” talk in April at The Shedd Institute. “But coupling science together with cultural knowledge, personal experience, introspection and what people have learned through other nonscientific methods is a very powerful mix. To do just one without the other can lead you far astray.”

It is exactly this mix of thoughtful people, personal conversations, and live meet-ups

that make science pubs such a winning combination, said John Frohnmayer, author of *Socrates the Rower: How Rowing Informs Philosophy* and chair of the National Endowment for the Arts in the first Bush presidential administration. Frohnmayer attended the Corvallis science pub performance of Knight and Ginger and pronounced it “fascinating” and “great fun.”

“It provides a community square in this electronically oriented world,” he said. Science pubs are particularly valuable now in the context of a national blowback against science and facts.

“One of the things about science is that it is fact based,” Frohnmayer said. “You have a theory, and you have to prove it, and you have to articulate it, and then you have other people do their own experiments to prove or disprove the theory. It allows a wealth of information in society to be tested and accumulate. If we can’t be reliant on the best knowledge and the best thinkers, what is the point of education? And without education, we cannot have a democracy.”

Scientists themselves are under increasing pressure to communicate science to the public, who as individuals and citizens need to make informed decisions for themselves and their communities about increasingly complex issues in health, science, technology and the environment. A good storyteller can spread a big idea to millions. That can be a blessing and a curse, pointed out UO physicist Raghuvier Parthasarathy.

In April, Parthasarathy gave a compelling Quack Chat on the dynamic ecosystem of gut microbes. In his blog, he warned readers to retain some skepticism in the face of such persuasive talks. “A danger of the storytelling approach is that style may win over substance — that we’ll judge the importance of scientific claims by how compelling their stories are,” he writes.

He held up psychology researcher Amy Cuddy and her “power pose” as a poster child for shoddy science. Her TED talk on the topic is the second most popular ever seen, he noted. “The task of critical thinking, I suppose, falls to the rest of us — scientists, educators or thoughtful consumers of science,” he said.

Some audience members of science pubs are in a better position than most to judge the content of the talks. Retired scientists Adina Kaiden and Sharon Krag have no complaints. In fact, Quack Chats and Science Pubs were one of several lifestyle benefits that convinced them to buy a house and move to Eugene from Baltimore this year.

“They are delightful,” Kaiden said. The science pubs give her a taste of her favorite times in graduate school, when she and her friends would gather over beer and a pizza and banter about data and ideas. “It’s one of the things I loved about being a scientist, aside from understanding some of the wonders of the world,” she said. “I have finally, at age 60-something, discovered yeah, I’m cool with being a nerd.” ■

Go to the online version of this story at eugeneweekly.com for a list of upcoming local science pubs.

EUGfun!

Join us for free, fun,
family-friendly events
all summer long

- Music
- Movies
- Performing Arts
- Family Fun
- And much more!

Huge Fun For All
#eugfun

Event Details at
eugfun.org

16

KMTN EUGENE

DESTINATION

Mix

PEDAL POWER

97.7

\$1

FULL GRAM
PRE-ROLLS

\$1

GRAMS

\$28-\$50-\$60

OUNCES

Premium Indoor

OUNCES!!!

\$79-\$89-\$99

ALL PRICES ARE TAX INCLUDED

Open Monday - Saturday, 10AM - 10PM
and Sunday, 11Am - 8PM

1257 High Street, Eugene • 541-505-9005

www.HushDispensary.com

Do not operate a vehicle or machinery under the influence of this drug.
For use only by adults 21 years of age and older. Keep out of reach of children.