

## **Barry Dickson and Josef Penninger receive Awards of the City of Vienna**

On 3<sup>rd</sup> of December 2014, City Councillor Andreas Mailath-Pokorny presented this year's Awards of the City of Vienna. Among the awardees are two scientists from the Vienna Biocenter, Vienna's center of excellence for life science research. Barry Dickson, former director of the Research Institute of Molecular Pathology (IMP), received the Natural Science Award. Josef Penninger, director of the Institute of Molecular Biotechnology (IMBA) of the Austrian Academy of Sciences, was honoured in the field of Medicine.

Both researchers have made significant contributions to their respective fields and to the international recognition of the Vienna Biocenter as a hot spot for basic research in molecular biology. They were both decorated with Austria's most prestigious research-award, the Wittgenstein Prize, and their projects received substantial funding through ERC Advanced Grants.

The Australian neurobiologist Barry Dickson came to Vienna in 1998 to take up a position as Group Leader at the IMP. From 2006 to 2012, he was Scientific Director of the institute. At present, he is leading a group at the HHMI's Janelia Farm Research Campus in Virginia, USA.

At the IMP, Barry Dickson established a strong focus on neurobiology and the study of neuronal circuits. His discoveries include master genes for innate behaviour like the mating ritual of the fruit fly. Upon his initiative, a unique fly library was set up which allows scientists to study the function of each of the 22 thousand genes. This research resource, the VDRC, is now one of the science support facilities at the Vienna Biocenter and is used by researchers all over the world.

Josef Penninger was honoured for his contributions to molecular medicine. Among his discoveries is the involvement of the protein RANKL in osteoporosis and hormone-dependent breast cancer. These discoveries have already led to the development of a novel treatment for osteoporosis.

In 2011, Josef Penninger's team was able to successfully cultivate haploid stem cells. This new and revolutionary resource has enormous potential for future applications, such as in testing the efficacy of chemotherapy. Another successful project has raised hopes to fight metastases; the concept will be tested in clinical trials starting later this year.

The awards follow a long tradition. Every year, the City of Vienna honours outstanding personalities who have contributed significantly to Vienna's reputation as a place for science and the arts. The Natural Science Award goes back to the year 1947, when Lise Meitner was the first recipient. The Prize for Medicine was introduced in 1982. All awardees are selected by independent juries.

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