

## Renewable Research: Georg nets \$10.4 million cancer grant



Gunda Georg shown working in her lab.

A senior KU medicinal chemistry professor has been awarded a \$10.4 million federal grant to mentor fellow faculty members across Kansas and support their promising research in the battle against cancer.

Gunda Georg, university distinguished professor in KU's School of Pharmacy and director of the Center for Cancer Experimental Therapeutics at the Kansas Masonic Cancer Institute, received the five-year grant from the Center of Biomedical Research Excellence (COBRE) program, which is part of the National Institutes of Health. COBRE previously awarded Georg a similar \$10 million grant in 2000 that ended this summer.

The new grant will continue to bring together researchers, working through the therapeutics center, from KU, the KU Medical Center, Kansas State University, Wichita State University and Emporia State University. The grant places an emphasis on developing promising cancer research efforts of junior faculty members.

"I am honored that COBRE has awarded KU a second grant to continue the promising research we have undertaken during the past five years," Georg said.

"This funding commitment shows that KU is a major contributor to promoting the work of researchers in finding treatments for cancer."

In addition to cancer research, the grant will foster mentoring relationships between the therapeutic center's senior staff and junior researchers, as well as contribute to KU's efforts to establish a prestigious National Cancer Institute Designated Cancer Center at KUMC.

"The COBRE program is a major success story for KU and our efforts to build the university into a major research center to find treatments and cures for cancer," said Chancellor Robert Hemenway. "This proves again that Dr. Georg is a nationally recognized scientist of great talent."

KU is pleased to have Georg's expertise and leadership involved in the therapeutics center, said Jim Roberts, vice provost for research and president of the KU Center for Research.

"The university and the state of Kansas will greatly benefit from the work Gunda and her colleagues conduct under this COBRE grant," he said.

Under the first grant, money was distributed on a competitive basis to researchers through COBRE First Awards and COBRE Projects, Georg said. ♦ These smaller awards typically ranged from \$50,000 to \$150,000 per year.

Two researchers that received COBRE Project awards under the first grant were Katherine Roby (2000), research associate professor at KUMC, and Kristi Neufeld (2002), KU assistant professor of molecular biosciences.

Roby's focus was on ovarian cancer and the role of Src, a molecule that signals information inside cells in ovarian cancer. The potential inhibition of Src activity as a future therapy was another facet of her study.

Neufeld's research involves the nuclear functions for the tumor suppressor protein APC. A greater understanding of APC and its role in controlling colon cell

division is necessary to develop better ways to treat colon cancer, a leading cause of cancer deaths among men.

Katsura Asano, K-State assistant professor of biology, received a COBRE First Award in 2002. His work focused on developing drug therapies to correct errors in translation initiation in genetic material that often lead to the onset of cancers.

Since receiving their initial COBRE awards, the researchers have since been awarded much larger, multiyear federal grants to continue and expand their work.

"We have really been quite successful in getting our researchers major additional funding beyond what they receive through COBRE," Georg said. "Part of our mission is to help these young researchers successfully apply and receive NIH funding on their own for their research."

In all, at least 17 KU faculty members were awarded COBRE Project Awards and 14 researchers were awarded COBRE First Awards under the first grant, Georg said. For the new grant, seven KU faculty members have been selected to receive either COBRE Project or First awards.

"It's very important to KU and to the state of Kansas to put these young researchers on the right track," she said.

Assisting Georg as co-principal investigator on the grant will be Richard Himes, KU professor emeritus in the Department of Molecular Biosciences. Himes was a key contributor in KU's success in securing the first COBRE grant, as well as in winning the new grant.

In addition to those awards, the university also was able to establish through Georg's first grant the KU High Throughput Screening Laboratory, under the direction of Qi-Zhaung Ye, research professor at the Higuchi Biosciences Center, that provides state-of-the-art equipment to screen hundreds of thousands of chemical compounds for biomedical research.