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March 2004

University News

**UNIVERSITY TEAM BOOSTS MARS MISSION:** Raymond E. Arvidson, Ph.D., the James S. McDonnell Distinguished University Professor and No. 2 scientist for the ongoing Mars mission, will remain at NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory in Pasadena, California, during the spring semester, as will most of the Washington University faculty and staff working on the mission. Senior Bethany Ehlmann, recently named a Rhodes Scholar, and two graduate students are members of the Washington University contingent working with the Athena Science Payload team.

**DINOSAUR FOSSIL RECORD COMPILED:** Julia Heathcote, graduate student in earth and planetary sciences, has combed the dinosaur fossil record from T. Rex to songbirds to compile the first quantitative analysis of the quality and congruence of that record.

**VILLAGE MELDS STUDENT ACADEMIC AND RESIDENTIAL LIVES:** Now in its third year, the Village, formerly known as Small Group Housing, is thriving. The original goals of the Village were to foster a seamless living and learning environment for students. "It's just a great balance of everything that college living has to offer," says junior Rich Hillesheim, president of the Village Student Assembly.

**NIH RESEARCH GRANT EXTENDED INTO 44TH YEAR:** Renewed for five years and more than \$11 million, the NIH-supported study "Cyclotron Produced Isotopes in Biology and Medicine" will be extended into its 44th year. The historic grant, which has supported research on imaging techniques and agents at the School of Medicine, supplied the funding that allowed physicist Michel M. Ter-Pogossian to lead the development of the first positron emission tomography (PET) scanner in the 1970s.



David Kilper/WUSTL Photo

Julia Heathcote, graduate student in earth and planetary sciences in Arts & Sciences, has done an inventory of the complete dinosaur fossil record, known as Dinosauria.

Research

**SMALL AMOUNTS OF ALCOHOL CAN CAUSE BRAIN DAMAGE:** Brief exposure to small amounts of alcohol or anesthetic drugs can trigger nerve cell death in the developing brain. "Our animal studies indicate that significant nerve cell death occurs in the infant mouse brain following exposure to blood alcohol levels equivalent to those a human fetus would be exposed to by maternal ingestion of two cocktails," says investigator John W. Olney, M.D., the John P. Feighner Professor of Neuropsychopharmacology. "With anesthetic drugs, a dose required to lightly anesthetize an infant mouse for about one hour is sufficient to trigger nerve cell death."

**WHAT YOU SEE IS NOT WHAT YOU GET:** The first time you don a new pair of bifocals, what you

perceive visually and what your hand does may be very different. A new collaborative study involving a biomedical engineer at Washington University and neurobiologists at the University of Pittsburgh shows that sometimes you can't believe anything you see. More important, the researchers have identified areas of the brain where what we're actually doing (reality) and what we think we're doing (illusion, or perception) are processed.



Joe Angeles/WUSTL Photo

The Truster hand-held "Emotion Reader" is one of many commercial products that claim to detect lies and deception using voice-stress analysis.

### RESEARCH CASTS DOUBT ON VOICE-STRESS

LIE DETECTION TECHNOLOGY: Voice-stress analysis, an alternative to the polygraph as a method for lie detection, is already widely used in police and insurance-fraud investigations. But Mitchell S. Sommers, Ph.D., associate professor of psychology and lead investigator on a study funded by the Department of Defense Polygraph Institute, is a skeptic: "In our evaluation, voice-stress analysis detected some instances of deception, but its ability to do so was consistently less than chance -- you could have gotten better results by flipping a coin."

### DYNAMIC PRICING IN RETAIL CAN BOOST

BOTTOM LINE: Dynamic pricing, long practiced in the airline and hotel industries, is showing promise and profitability in the world of retail. When applied to products sold over a short sales season -- new toys, skiwear, and the like -- dynamic pricing can boost profits for a firm,

according to research conducted by Yossi Aviv, Ph.D., and Amit Pazgal, Ph.D., associate professors in the John M. Olin School of Business.

## Features

ST. PATRICK'S REAL LIFE MORE EXCITING THAN MYTH: Forget about the snakes. In "St. Patrick of Ireland: A Biography," the forthcoming book by Philip M. Freeman, Ph.D., assistant professor of classics, the historical life of Patrick reads like something out of a Hollywood action movie script. From being kidnapped by pirates from his home in Britain, to living as a slave for six years in Ireland, to escaping, but then returning to the country in which he had been held captive to minister to the people there, Patrick led a remarkable and adventurous life.

ACTIVE AGING: Looking to chase away the winter blues? Interested in staying active after retirement? Need a boost to your health? Try volunteering at your church or a neighborhood organization for a few hours a week -- it could do you a world of good. Just two hours of volunteering a week can have a positive effect on the overall well-being of older Americans, according to a study conducted by the George Warren Brown School of Social Work.



Photo courtesy of The OASIS Institute  
Volunteering can have a positive effect on the overall well-being of older Americans.

GENETICS OF ADDICTION: An estimated 35 million smokers try to quit smoking each year, but only about 7 percent succeed in remaining smoke-free for more than a year. Most relapse within a few days of quitting and require multiple attempts before they can give up cigarettes. "The people who could quit, quit. Now we're left with a group of really committed smokers," explains Laura Bierut, M.D., associate professor of psychiatry.

## Heard on Campus

"Democracy and the environment are intertwined. The best measure of how a democracy is working is how it distributes the goods of the land, the things that we all own in common, the public trust, the commons: the air that we breathe, the water, the property of every man."

- Robert F. Kennedy, Jr., senior attorney for the National Resources Defense Council and president of the Waterkeeper Alliance, delivering the Assembly Series lecture, "Our Environmental Destiny," February 25, 2004.

## Kudos

J. Perren Cobb, M.D., associate professor of surgery and director of the Cellular Injury and Adaptation Laboratory, was installed as president of the Association for Academic Surgery at its 2003 annual meeting.

Annelise Mertz, professor emerita in the Performing Arts Department in Arts and Sciences, has received the 2004 Missouri Arts Award, the state's highest honor for achievement in the arts, for her contributions to arts education.

William A. Peck, M.D., the Alan A. and Edith L. Wolff Distinguished Professor of Medicine and founding director of the Center for Health Policy, received the National Children's Cancer Society Legacy Award at that organization's International Humanitarian Award Dinner on January 23.

Peter Raven, Ph.D., the George Engelmann Professor of Botany and director of the Missouri Botanical Garden, will receive the Royal Horticultural Society's Veitch Memorial Medal for 2004. The award is given to those who have made an outstanding contribution to the advancement and improvement of horticulture. Dr. Raven is the only American among the six award winners chosen by the horticultural organization and gardening charity in the United Kingdom.

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