

FACULTY'S "WINGFIELDS" SOAR YET AGAIN

The Faculty of Natural and Agricultural Sciences at the University of Pretoria (UP) is proud to announce that the exceptional achievements of Prof. Mike Wingfield, Director of FABI (Forestry & Agricultural Biotechnology Institute), and Faculty Deputy Dean, Prof. Brenda Wingfield, have again been recognized and rewarded.

The African Union honoured Prof. Brenda Wingfield with an AU Women Scientist Regional Award which recognizes her great scientific achievements and contribution, through science, to the socio-economic development of Africa. The official awards ceremony was held on African Union Day, 9 September 2009, at the African Union Commission Headquarters Conference Centre in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. The honorable South African Ambassador to Ethiopia received the award on her behalf.

The AU's Women Scientists' Awards Programme stems from the Commission of African Union's attempts to promote science in Africa and is being implemented by Regional Economic Communities within the five regions of Africa.

"One does not do research to receive awards, but recognition is deeply appreciated, and this recognition is certainly not only to myself but to the many students and colleagues that have supported me. I hope that this award will encourage women to consider careers in Science, especially in those domains that are considered nationally as scarce skills," says Prof. Brenda Wingfield.

According to Prof. Wingfield, being part of an outstanding research-orientated institution such as the University of Pretoria (UP), has enabled her to reach her goals. She makes a point further that being part of the world-class Forestry and Agricultural Biotechnology Institute (FABI), has provided her with a community of colleagues and superb students that has synergised her research and mentorship in many ways. The world class facilities, opportunities to contribute to global projects, as well as the quality of work done at UP and FABI have been fundamental to her success.

Prof. Mike Wingfield as the recipient of the "Biotech Fundi Capacity Builder Award 2009" at a function held at the Innovation Hub, Pretoria, on Monday 31 August. This was one of six Biotech Fundi Awards presented at a Gala event that evening as part of a comprehensive incentive scheme set up by the Gauteng Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (GDARD) to support, promote and develop those individuals and companies who make a significant impact on the Biotech sector in Gauteng.

The specific award presented to Prof Wingfield is reserved for a person who has gone the extra mile with regard to empowering students and colleagues by imparting his insight and skills in order to add to trainees' market readiness in the biotech sector. In announcing the award, Prof. Chrissie Rey made the point that Mike Wingfield has been the advisor of a remarkable number of M.Sc. and Ph.D. students during his academic career and that many of his past students hold very significant positions, and have won other important awards in many parts of the world.

"Perhaps the single element of my career in Science that I have enjoyed most, is sharing my love of biology with students and younger colleagues. I have been privileged to be able to work with and hopefully positively influence students not only from South Africa but also from many parts of the world, and this has been enormously rewarding. Seeing past

students excell and move to levels that I could not have hoped to reach, is a great joy,” says Prof. Mike Wingfield.

He remarks that the award is neither the benchmark nor the epitome of his work, but it certainly does play a role in encouraging him to continue. “As is true of most awards, this one belongs to many people” he says. “Very few scientists are given the opportunity to establish research institutes from scratch, as I was able to do in the late 90’s with the Forestry and Agricultural Biotechnology Institute better known as FABI”. He continues that “FABI has provided an amazing training ground not only for my students but also for the remarkable team of scientists that lead the Institute. We have fabulous facilities, an exceptional atmosphere and incredible mentorship at every level. This together with some of the most exceptional students (past and present) deeply underpins the basis for this award. I am proud to carry it on behalf of those to which it rightfully belongs”.

When asked to elaborate on their relationship as scientists, Mike Wingfield said “our collaboration has brought incredible strength to both our careers. Brenda is a biochemist by training and she entered molecular genetics at the time that the impact of recombinant DNA research was just beginning to touch the biological sciences. She was able to help me to bring DNA-based techniques into my research field which was very much ecological. Amazing synergy has emerged from our collaboration and there is no question that our students and colleagues have benefited from this too”. He concludes that “teamwork, hard work and passion can hardly be beaten when seeking to accomplish one’s goals”.



Prof. Brenda Wingfield – Deputy Dean of the Faculty of Natural and Agricultural Sciences, University of Pretoria.



Prof. Michael “Mike” Wingfield – Director: Forestry & Agricultural Biotechnology Institute (FABI), University of Pretoria (Photo provided with the kind permission of the Gauteng Department of Agriculture and Rural Development).