

## FABI EXHIBITS AT THE SOUTH AFRICAN RESEARCH CHAIRS INITIATIVE (SARCHI) AWARDS CEREMONY

*Prepared by: Osmond Mlonyeni, Gudrun Dittrich-Schröder, Marcelle Vermeulen and Priyen Pillay*

On 6 August 2009, the Minister of Science and Technology, Dr Naledi Pandor, officiated at a function at the Botanical Gardens in Pretoria at which she congratulated the ten new awardees of the South African Research Chairs Initiative (SARCHI) and made an announcement about New Research Chairs. The function was attended by the DVC of Higher Education Institutions (HEI's), the recipients of the newly awarded Research Chairs, Vice Chancellors and Directors of Research of HEI's, and representatives of the Private and Business sector, other National Government Departments, the National Research Foundation (NRF) as well as FABI representatives.

The aim of SARCHI is to *'expand the scientific research base of South Africa in a way that is relevant to national development goals in an internationally competitive global knowledge economy'*. This is envisaged to be achieved by attracting internationally acclaimed researchers and scientists who will conduct research, in publicly funded Higher Education Institutions, that address the challenges associated with the developmental needs of the country and mentorship of post-graduate students.

The new Research Chairs are an addition to the 72 previously awarded since its inception in 2007. The researchers come from the Universities of Pretoria, Cape Town, Fort Hare, Johannesburg, KwaZulu-Natal, Rhodes, Western Cape and Walter Sisulu University for Technology and Science. Seven of the ten new Research Chairs were awarded to researchers working in the field of social and human sciences. This clearly acknowledged the importance of a paradigm shift on the role that social sciences can and must play with respect to scientific and technological innovation.



**Left: Priyen Pillay, Osmond Mlonyeni, Gudrun Dittrich Schröder, Marcelle Vermeulen and Prof Teresa Coutinho at the FABI exhibit. Right: The FABI exhibit.**

Apart from conducting research, the effective communication of such research is important and very necessary. Mr Bheki Hadebe of the Department of Science and Technology (DST), invited the NRF and FABI, housing one of the seven DST/NRF Centres of Excellence, to exhibit at the event. Through the assistance of technology, the attendees were invited to share in the experience and engage with the diverse research topics undertaken in FABI at its exhibition stall. The 10 year FABI anniversary DVD put a face to this dynamic research Institution. A slide show illustrating pathogens (fungal and bacterial), insect pests of trees and agricultural crops, the damage caused by these and the analysis of "woody" trees, also captured everyone's attention and imagination.



**Prof Teresa Coutinho and Jenny Hale (FABI), Mr Bheki Hadebi (DST), Dr Linda Mthwisha (Manager of SARChi programme, NRF) and Vusi Duma (DST)**

Team FABI was also on hand to share their expertise, answer any questions sparked by the exhibition and had informative material, such as the latest Biennial Report and research brochures, ready to distribute to the attendees. This opportunity provided team FABI with a platform to communicate its research beyond its domain of study. The FABI exhibition showcased the dynamic nature of the Institute so successfully, that the team was asked whether FABI had a new department - THE MARKETING DEPARTMENT!

As this event marked the continuation of establishing building blocks for research excellence that is responsive to South African needs, it can be said that the active alignment of expectation and reality is well and truly under way!

*Our thanks go to Osmond, Gudrun, Marcele and Priyen for preparing a wonderful exhibit at very short notice and, together with Prof Teresa Coutinho, for representing FABI at this important function.*



**FABI provides the catalyst for Plant Biotechnology research at the University of Pretoria, with active research groups in the Departments of Plant Science, Genetics, Microbiology and Plant Pathology, and collaborations with the Department of Biochemistry through the Bioinformatics and Computational Biology Unit.**



**Banner of the Forest Molecular Genetics (FMG) Programme titled "GENES FOR PULP and PAPER".**