



Paul Morrison Concludes 41 Years at Core of Innovative Research Analysis

Paul Morrison estimates that he's met with close to 1,500 faculty members in his 41 years at Dana-Farber, and the Molecular Biology Core Facilities (MBCF) he founded and directs has helped countless more with DNA sequencing, genotyping, and other critical research tasks. Three generations of colleagues praise his ability to utilize the latest technological trends to uncover the mysteries of cancer, AIDS, and other diseases.

Now, as he prepares to retire on May 28, Morrison ponders the secret behind his successful career.

"Make sure you're always doing enjoyable stuff," he says. "If a certain technology becomes mundane, it doesn't belong in a Dana-Farber core facility. That's the time to move on to something new."

This is exactly what Morrison was aiming for in 1980 when he heard that then-Dana-Farber researcher Richard Kolodner, PhD, was seeking an expert in electron microscopy (EM)- a technique for obtaining high resolution images of DNA plasmids- to help his lab with its DNA repair and recombination cancer genomics studies.

"I worked my way through UMASS Amherst as a lab tech and unloading freight cars, and decided science was more fun for me," Morrison says. "I had taken an advanced EM course at UMASS, and planned to help Richard out for a year and a half, then go to graduate school."

In the end, Morrison took a different course. He loved Dana-Farber, with its never-ending stream of compelling projects led by world-renowned scientists. These researchers, in turn, found in him someone who could quickly analyze, interpret, and calculate their data for use in grant applications, journal articles, or presentations.

"Paul understood that transformative technologies drive scientific discovery, and that for Dana-Farber investigators to succeed, they needed easy and affordable access to the newest and best approaches," says Myles Brown, MD, co-director of the Center

for Functional Cancer Epigenetics and a collaborator of Morrison's since the early 1980s. "His love of new technology extended beyond the realm of DNA sequencing; he was a very early user of the internet and a supporter of computational biology."



Paul Morrison, who came to Dana-Farber in 1980 and founded and directed the Molecular Biology Core Facilities (MBCF) in 1984, will retire May 28 after 41 years on staff. Morrison is pictured here (left) with MBCF staff.

Science and Segways

Morrison's people skills, Brown and others agree, has been another major factor in the success of the MBCF since its 1984 founding.

"He develops good relationships with the scientists, listens to their needs, and evolves the core accordingly," says Aideen Mulligan, chief of staff to the chief scientific officer. "Keeping up with the newest technologies and staying current with the field of genomics is important to Paul."

So is wide-spread collaboration. Although Morrison established the MBCF for Dana-Farber investigators to access cutting-edge genomic and proteomic technologies in a shared-use setting, he has shared its resources with other academic institutions and industry. He also took on another leadership role in 2004 as director of the Molecular Biology and Genomics Core Facility in the



Center for AIDS Research at Harvard University.

"Paul is well known locally, and has a strong national reputation within his field," says Michelle Cox, senior vice president for Research Operations. "He has cultivated relationships within the Harvard community and has a number of outside labs that consistently utilize the MBCF core."

Mentorship has been another strong suit. Noting his rare status as a Harvard Medical School faculty member without an PhD or MD, Morrison points with pride to the many MBCF staffers who have later pursued advanced degrees and risen through the ranks at Dana-Farber.

"Paul allows and encourages you to move forward on your ideas," says Jim Lee, the MBCF's proteomics expert. "He cuts through the red tape and gets things done."

Humor and humility also help.

"Paul takes cancer research very seriously, but not himself," says Zachery Herbert, who in 17 years has ascended from lab tech to the MBCF's associate director. "There is nothing in the lab that he would not be willing to do himself."

There was one time, Morrison admits, that his devotion to staff and the latest high-tech gadgetry may have gone a bit too far.

"After the core moved from the Longwood campus to 20 Overland Street, I convinced leadership we needed a pair of Segways to transport studies back and forth quickly to researchers," Morrison recalls. "I think we rode them to campus once, but we did have some



Morrison credits humor as one of his keys to success.

great races around the Fenway for a few summers."

Morrison says he will have no trouble keeping busy in retirement. An avid kayaker, sailor, windsurfer, and fisherman, he also dabbles in pottery and contributes to



Morrison is looking forward to a retirement filled with fishing and other outdoor sports.

a blog covering Gloucester - where he lives with his wife, Brandeis researcher Susan Lovett, PhD, and their two adult children. He knows the MBCF will thrive under Herbert, his successor, but he laments leaving the action.

"I'll miss the weekly epigenetics seminars, where someone discusses the latest data and the latest ways that cells are talking to each other," says Morrison. "Each week they find different pieces to the jigsaw puzzle, and they are finding corner pieces now. It just keeps moving along."

- Saul Wisnia



Comments

“ We will miss you, best wishes! Nelly ”

Kornelia, M.D., Ph.D. Polyak

“ Congratulations on all that you have accomplished and on opening a new chapter in your life. I’m sure it will continue to be an exciting venture. ”

Olive

“ It says so much about Dana-Farber that we find ourselves writing several stories a year about people retiring after 25, 35, 40 years or more on the job! It makes their amazing achievement no less notable, but shows how much people love this place and its secret sauce. ”

Saul_1

“ Congratulations on all that you have accomplished and on opening a new chapter in your life. I’m sure it will continue to be an exciting venture. ”

Olive

“ Congratulations and best wishes for a very Happy Retirement! ”

Joellen Fredericks