

## Sparks in the Night:

**W. Jonathan Lederer M.D. Ph.D., UMBI's Medical Biotechnology Center Director, Feted**

March 3, 2007



*Baltimore, MD* As the discoverer of calcium sparks, Dr. W. Jonathan Lederer is used to surprising results, but the party in his honor was truly a big surprise. He thought he was going to dinner with a few friends and former laboratory fellows who were in town for the annual Biophysical Society meeting. Little did he know that nearly 130 friends, colleagues, and current and former students, staff, and fellows, as well as his wife and two daughters, had come together to celebrate the sixty years since his birth, the thirty years since his first paper, and the nearly 15 years since the discovery of calcium sparks, which has revolutionized the way calcium signaling in heart is studied.

The event entitled *Sparks in the Night: Currents, Calcium, and Confocals* featured "sparking" nametags and fiber optic decorations, to remind participants of the light based techniques that Dr. Lederer has pioneered in his efforts to understand heart function and the underlying causes of heart disease. The evening featured the Amazing Pepe, a.k.a Dr. Jose Puglisi in real life, a researcher at Loyola University, Chicago, as well as reminiscences from various stages of Dr. Lederer's career. From Dr. Richard Tsien, his graduate advisor, to Dr. Jennie Hunter-Cevera, President of UMBI and his current boss, the stories and events that have shaped Dr. Lederer's remarkable career both inspired and amused the guests.

"Dr. Lederer is being honored by his colleagues around the world for his break through science," commented Dr. Hunter-Cevera. "But we also know him for his service as Director of UMBI's Medical Biotechnology Center, leading the center through a significant period of growth, research success, and expansion into new areas including neurobiology, fluorescence, and national defense."

To commemorate the event, a laser-etched crystal display piece, presented by Dr. Hunter-Cevera, combined the frontispiece from Dr. Lederer's first



publication in 1986, which announced the discovery of a new cardiac current; the frontispiece from the 1993 paper on the discovery of calcium sparks; and an illustration of a three dimensional reconstruction of a calcium spark, as well as the name and date of the event.

The organizing committee of Dr. David Eisner, University of Manchester; Dr. Mark Nelson, University of Vermont; and Dr. Peace Cheng, University of Peking, were helped by Dr. Lederer's Assistant, Pamela Wright, in both getting the message out to colleagues and keeping it a secret from the guest of honor.

Sponsors were also most generous in supporting the effort, especially Carl Zeiss, Inc, the Totman Trust, and UMBI. Proceeds from the event will be used to support Dr. Lederer's cardiac research.

The dinner web site, [www.umbi.umd.edu/~mbc/sparks](http://www.umbi.umd.edu/~mbc/sparks) has pictures of the event, as well as a pdf version of the program.