4-1-2009

Dr. Frederick A. Murphy Selected 2009 Penn Vet World Award Recipient
Dr. Frederick A. Murphy
Selected 2009 Penn Vet
World Award Recipient

“Y
ou must never forget where you came
from.” These words are at the heart of
the long and successful career of noted
virologist Dr. Frederick A. Murphy,
who was selected as the 2009 recipient
of the Penn Vet World Leadership Award. Dr. Murphy is the
James W. McLaughlin Professor in Residence, Department of
Pathology at the University of Texas Medical Branch (UTMB) at
Galveston.

The timing of the $100,000 award could not have been better.
In September 2008, Hurricane Ike devastated the island city of
Galveston, Tx. “It seems that human nature is such that people
who do not see the remaining damage every day tend to forget
about it,” said Dr. Murphy. “But, as with Katrina, recovery is a
long-term matter.”

Dr. Murphy had left for a meeting in Washington, D.C., when
the evacuation order was issued before the hurricane struck. “I
came back as soon as it was possible—that was when reality set in.
The media did not really capture the true level of destruction and
human tragedy,” he said. “My condo was fine, but many friends
suffered substantial damage to their homes. Worse off were the
poorest people in town, those living in older, lower houses, many
of which were destroyed.

“The university suffered great loss, too—an estimated
$710M—resulting in layoffs of hospital staff. We are rebuilding
UTMB, but there is a long way to go. One bright spot was the
Galveston National Lab, which had been dedicated a few weeks
before the hurricane hit. It is the first academic large maximum
containment lab in the country—it suffered no damage and
rapid progress is being made in occupying it and starting up its
emerging disease and biodefense research programs.”

Dr. Murphy plans to contribute some of the prize money
toward Galveston’s recovery. “My beloved wife, Irene, who died
in 2000, taught me to focus on the most needful among us, and
now I will do more in this regard. Also, I had been wondering
where I could find some money to support my habit, my
seemingly never-ending professional life—now I will not have
to wonder,” he said. Dr. Murphy has been working on a history
project called The Foundations of Medical and Veterinary Virology:
Discoverers and Discoveries, Inventors and Inventions, Developers
and Technology. Available on the Web at www.utmb.edu/ihii/
viruseimages/index.shtml, the project, now better funded, will be
used for teaching.

Dr. Murphy’s greatest impact on the future of the veterinary
profession is his expertise in the field of infectious disease; in
particular, he has played a leadership role in viral pathogenesis
and has articulated clearly the role of animal pathogens in
new and emerging diseases. “As an internationally acclaimed
authority in comparative virology, Dr. Murphy is a pioneering
researcher, respected advisor in health policy and outstanding
spokesperson for the veterinary profession, which has led to his
unparalleled contributions to veterinary medicine,” said Dr. Joan
C. Hendricks, the Gilbert S. Kahn Dean of Veterinary Medicine.
“We are proud to recognize his vast and impressive achievements
with this year’s Penn Vet World Leadership Award.”

The Penn Vet World Leadership Award is given annually
to a veterinarian who has dramatically changed the practice and
image of the profession and substantially influenced the lives
and careers of others. The award provides the recipient with
$100,000 in unrestricted funding, the largest monetary award in
veterinary medicine, underwritten by the Vernon and Shirley Hill
Foundation.

“Shirley and I are pleased to support the prestigious Penn Vet
World Leadership Award, which recognizes the outstanding
individuals whose achievements have significantly advanced both
the veterinary profession and humanity,” said Vernon Hill. “Dr.
Murphy truly exemplifies excellence in the critical global health
arena. We are honored to underwrite this award to help advance
Dr. Murphy’s important research.”

Dr. Murphy has made significant contributions that benefit
society and advance the veterinary profession through his research
work on viruses impacting animals and humans; highlighting the
critical importance of new and emerging diseases of animal origin
as the major cause of these new illnesses; leadership at national and
international levels, publications, speaking engagements around
the world; and mentoring and teaching of young scholars.

“I share this honor with my family; everything that has been
good in my life is grounded in my family life,” he said. “My four
sons, my four daughters-in-law and my five grandchildren are the
joy of my life.

“I would also like everyone to know how proud I am of the
veterinary medical profession and the veterinarians I have known
around the country and around the world. They are the salt of
the earth. In thinking of all my colleagues in academic veterinary
medicine, public health, international health and comparative
medicine, I feel that my colleagues are serving the public interest
very well, indeed—serving the needs of animal health, human
health and environmental/ecological health. I am lucky to be
living my life among these men and women,” he said.