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RiboWest Conference 2018 brings together top RNA researchers from Western Canada and beyond

Leading investigators in the field of ribonucleic acid (RNA) research and genomics are gathering at the University of Lethbridge (U of L), June 10-13, 2018, to attend the 14th Annual RiboWest Conference, organized by the members of the Alberta RNA Research and Training Institute (ARRTI).

Many of us have heard of DNA, the biomolecule that constitutes the letters of the book of life. However, few of us may have heard of DNA 's cousin, RNA, a similar biomolecule that during the last decades has emerged as a molecule of equal importance to DNA.

“We now know that RNA is implicated in many diseases ranging from infections, to cancer and Alzheimer’s disease,” says Dr. Nehal Thakor, one of the organizers and a member of the Alberta RNA Research and Training Institute (ARRTI) at the University of Lethbridge. “But RNA can also serve in the diagnosis and as a therapeutic agent of many diseases as well as a tool in bioengineering of cells to generate novel compounds.”

The RiboWest Conference brings together an interdisciplinary group of scientists, all of whom share the passion of deciphering and decoding the secrets of RNA and its role in numerous human diseases.

“This meeting is an excellent opportunity for networking, establishing new collaborations and having fun in sharing our enthusiasm for RNA,” says Dr. Athan Zovoilis, another member of ARRTI and an assistant professor at the U of L. “This year’s conference is focussed on modern RNA genomics and epigenomics technologies that can provide detailed insights into the role of RNA in health and diseases. We’re expecting nearly 100 attendees and 5 invited speakers from 10 universities as well as representatives from multiple business enterprises.”

This year’s conference hosts five keynote and invited speakers, delivering talks that will be free and open to the public, in the Markin Hall Atrium.

RiboWest Conference 2018 will open with Dr. Sonenberg’s Gairdner lecture. Sonenberg is a James McGill Professor and Gilman Cheney Chair in the Department of Biochemistry

and the Rosalind and Morris Goodman Cancer Research Centre at McGill University. Sonenberg won the Gairdner International Award in 2008. His talk (Sunday, June 10, 6 p.m.) discusses how preparation of proteins, key molecules for cell survival, in normal condition and diseases such as cancer, obesity, diabetes and neurological diseases is controlled.

Dr. Steven Jones, the head of the Bioinformatics Department and Associate Director of the Michael Smith Genome Sciences Centre in Vancouver will follow with his talk about the recent advances in his laboratory at 7 p.m. on Sunday. His laboratory is at the forefront of new genomics technologies that help us to understand the causes of cancer and in applying revolutionary diagnostic tools for detecting and treating cancer.

The conference will continue on Monday, June 11 at 8 a.m., as Dr. Martin Hirst will present this year's breakthrough talk in epigenetics, sponsored by the Alberta Epigenetics Network. Hirst, the head of epigenomics at the Michael Smith Genome Sciences Centre and an associate professor in the Department of Microbiology and Immunology at the University of British Columbia, has had a profound impact on Canadian and international epigenomics research.

Dr. Michelle Scott will present on Tuesday, June 12 at 8 a.m. and discuss her work on the effect of mid-sized RNAs in health. She is an associate professor in the Department of Biochemistry at the University of Sherbrooke. Scott is recognized internationally for her work in bioinformatics of small non-coding RNAs and her research involves the development of computational tools for the analysis of the transcriptome.

World-renowned RNA researcher, Dr. Jennifer Kugel, will close the event with a talk on Tuesday at 4:45 p.m., discussing regulation of RNA polymerase II by SINE encoded ncRNAs. She is a professor in the Department of Chemistry and Biochemistry at the University of Colorado at Boulder, and has been a leading force in current RNA research and understanding of the role of mobile repetitive elements in the genome.

Stephen Rader of the University of Northern British Columbia organized the first RiboWest Conference in 2005. Since 2008, ARRTI hosts the event every second year.

For a complete look at RiboWest 2018, visit <https://www.ribowest.org/>

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Contact:

Trevor Kenney, News & Information Manager
403-329-2710
403-360-7639 (cell)
trevor.kenney@uleth.ca

To view online: <http://www.uleth.ca/unews/article/ribowest-conference-2018-brings-together-top-rna-researchers-western-canada-and-beyond>

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