

MEDIA RELEASE

NEWS FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF TASMANIA

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UTAS scientists celebrated as Tall Poppies

A separation scientist from the University of Tasmania was named the 2010 Young Tasmanian Tall Poppy of the Year at a presentation last night hosted by The Honourable Chief Justice Ewan Crawford, Lieutenant Governor of Tasmania.

Dr Robert Shellie, a Senior Lecturer at the UTAS School of Chemistry and the Australian Centre for Research on Separation Science (ACROSS), was recognised by the Tall Poppy Campaign for research excellence and his involvement in the promotion of science, particularly among young people. Also celebrated were Dr Jerome Staal, a neurologist from the Menzies Research Institute, and Dr Peter While, a Post-Doctoral Fellow from the UTAS School of Mathematics and Physics.

It is the second year that Tasmania has been included in the national Tall Poppy campaign. Last year the inaugural Tasmanian Tall Poppy Award was won by Dr Emily Hilder, who, like Dr Shellie, is a UTAS separation scientist. Dr Hilder has since become the Tall Poppy Campaign Ambassador for Tasmania.

“This award is especially thrilling because I see a strong importance in communicating science in a meaningful way outside of my scientific discipline,” Dr Shellie said.

“I’m looking forward to continued opportunities for community engagement through the Tall Poppy Campaign.”

Dr Shellie specialises in an area called ‘multidimensional chromatography’. But what does that mean?

Chromatography is a technique that allows scientists to separate mixtures so that the amount of each component in the mixture can be measured. Multidimensional chromatography has given rise to sensitive approaches for the analysis of a wide range of very complex mixtures – everything from allergens in perfumes through to the detection of small traces of explosives that might be used by terrorists.

Dr Shellie is also working with a team of UTAS researchers to develop a blood test that can show if a Tasmanian devil has contracted the Devil Facial Tumour Disease – even before the animal develops symptoms (or can further spread the contagious cancer).

The national Tall Poppy Campaign was created in 1998 by the Australian Institute of Policy and Science (AIPS). As well as celebrating science and its communication to

the public, its aim is to encourage younger Australians to follow in the footsteps of our outstanding achievers.

Dr Peter While, who was also recognised as a Tasmanian Tall Poppy, specialises in the area of Applied Mathematics.

Dr While is currently working on designing hardware for Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) Scanners, concentrating on the areas of electro-magnetism and calculus. Dr While has also become involved in an outreach program that has been developed by lecturers within the UTAS School of Mathematics and Physics.

Meanwhile Dr Jerome Staal, a Neuroscientist with the Menzies Research Institute, is investigating the neurological changes that occur during aging and following traumatic brain injury. One of his areas of interest is the way the brain reacts to events like traumatic brain injury or Alzheimer's disease.

"We know that these conditions are not instantaneous, irreversible events occurring at the time of injury or disease onset," he said, "and therein lies the potential for neuroprotection, as we have a substantial window of opportunity to prevent further damage and/or encourage regeneration".