Moore Named HHMI’s First Chief Operating Officer

Cheryl Moore, who played a pivotal role in development of the Janelia Farm Research Campus as its chief operating officer (COO), has been named executive vice president and COO for the Institute. Moore, 44, is the first person to hold the position and assumed her new responsibilities in September. She will lead collaborative strategic efforts for HHMI and oversee operational functions of the organization.

“This is a new position, one well suited to Cheryl’s extraordinary record of achievement and dedication to HHMI,” says HHMI President Robert Tjian. “She will be a superb partner for me and a great asset to HHMI’s executive team, particularly as we identify strategic directions and implement best practices in our operations that will advance the Institute’s work as a science-driven organization that supports research and education at the highest levels.”

Moore joined HHMI in 2004 as COO of Janelia Farm. She was responsible for all operational aspects of the campus and its $100 million annual budget.

“Cheryl literally took Janelia Farm from an empty building to a fully operational campus. She recruited a team who worked tirelessly to create every bit of the infrastructure from scratch,” says Gerald M. Rubin, director of the Janelia Farm campus.

Before becoming COO of Janelia Farm, Moore served as senior vice president and COO of what is now known as the Sanford-Burnham Institute for Medical Research in La Jolla, California. A native of Illinois, Moore spent much of her professional career in the San Diego area, where she also held top management positions with an international financial services firm and both start-up and public health care companies. She is a graduate of the University of San Diego.

Moore serves on the board of the Association of Independent Research Institutes and until recently served on advisory boards for a number of other organizations, including the Krasnow Institute for Advanced Study at George Mason University, the Virginia campus of George Washington University, and the Virginia Biotechnology Association. She has also been a member of the Economic Development Commission of Loudoun County, Virginia. She was named one of the top 25 “Women Who Mean Business” for 2007 by the Washington Business Journal and was nominated for the 2008 Athena Pinnacle Award, honoring women leaders in San Diego.

Going Green: New Program Provides Vital Support for Plant Scientists

HHMI and the Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation (GBMF) announced in September a new research program that will provide critical support to some of the nation’s most innovative plant scientists. The institutions, which are collaborating for the first time, will invest a combined total of $75 million in the program over the next five years.

HHMI and GBMF will select as many as 15 investigators working in a range of scientific disciplines relevant to plant sciences. The national competition, which runs until November 9, 2010, is open to researchers who have managed their own lab for at least four years. The scientists will receive an initial five-year appointment to HHMI and the support necessary to move their research in creative, new directions. Appointments may be renewed for additional five-year terms, contingent on a successful scientific review.

Despite the central role plants play in maintaining human health and in healthcare, basic research in the plant sciences historically has been underfunded. The bulk of the United States Department of Agriculture funding has not gone to competitive basic research and the Biology Directorate program at the National Science Foundation is relatively small, with few dedicated programs in fundamental plant biology. Furthermore, plant science researchers receive a small percentage of funding from the National Institutes of Health.

“There is no question that plant scientists have a tremendous potential to help address—and possibly alleviate—some of society’s most pressing concerns, such as food production, human health, protection of the environment, and renewable energy,” says HHMI President Robert Tjian. “We are very fortunate to have found in the Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation an institution that believes, as we do, that we must act now to do more to nurture and support the bold ideas of the best plant scientists.”

Since its creation in 2000, GBMF, headquartered in Palo Alto, California, has focused on supporting environmental conservation, non-biomedical science, and the San Francisco Bay Area. The path that led to the HHMI–GBMF collaboration began in 2008, when the scientific leadership of HHMI met with the Institute’s medical advisory board to brainstorm ideas for new research initiatives. A plant science research program emerged as a top contender. (continued on page 48)