2011 HIGHLIGHTS (CONT.)

COMPUTER SCIENCE TAKES ON DEEP THINKERS

Answer: What is Watson? This IBM computer soundly defeated big-time Jeopardy! champions in a widely watched prime-time showdown. But Watson won’t power down now; the UMAmherst scientists behind the famous computer have other tasks in mind. “Our goal is to push this well beyond Jeopardy!” says Eric Brown ’96 PhD, the IBM research manager who helped develop Watson. “We’re thinking about the real-world business applications where we can take the technology behind Watson.” Applying the technology to improve health care by helping medical practitioners evaluate data will be one of the first areas IBM explores, he explains. UMass computer scientist James Allen and his research team contributed information retrieval technology to the Watson project.

CENTER FOR CLINICAL AND TRANSLATIONAL SCIENCE

In July 2010, UMass Medical School received a five-year, $20 million grant from the National Institutes of Health (NIH) to support the recently established University of Massachusetts Center for Clinical and Translational Science (UMCCTS).

Connell River Watershed is Tested for Climate Change Effects

Casey Brown ’94M.S., civil and environmental engineering, is using the Connecticut River as a model for research on new ways to achieve ecologically sustainable water management while dealing with climate change. The work is funded through a five-year, $419,097 Career grant from the National Science Foundation. Brown explains that his work begins by recognizing that climate change means the historical records of water flows in the river basin, rain and snow amounts, and the impact of droughts and other weather events are no longer sufficient to accurately predict future events in the watershed. “The historical river is not a good representation of what the future river is going to be,” Brown says.

SAFE DRIVING LAB NAMED FOR ARBELLA INSURANCE GROUP

Distracted driving results in an estimated 1.6 million crashes and 6,000 deaths in the U.S. each year. Thankfully, ongoing research at UMass Amherst is aimed at reducing those numbers. In recognition of its life-saving research on the dangers of distracted driving, the newly renamed Arbella Insurance Group Charitable Foundation to study Environmental Justice Research

Environmental conservationist Andy Danylichuk and colleagues have discovered previously unknown spawning habitats of bonefish that should help focus habitat conservation efforts for this favorite fish of sport fishers. Knowing that bonefish spend time outside shallow flats means that pre-spaing aggregation sites and deeper reef habitats also need to be protected to sustain bonefish populations. Danylichuk is familiar to many as a result of several appearances on the ESPN2 network series Pirates of the Flats. The research was supported by the Bonefish and Tarpon Trust, the Patagonia World Trout Initiative, the Cape Eleuthera Institute, and a number of private donors. The results appear in the journal Marine Biology.

ISENBERG TEAM PublishES STUDY ON EFFECTIVE POST-DISASTER SUPPLY CHAINS

Researchers in the Isenberg School of Management have released their findings on the optimal design of supply chain networks, intended to help improve the disaster relief capability and response time of companies, government-based groups, and humanitarian organizations around the globe. After a disaster or emergency, the needs of the affected population should be met as comprehensively and efficiently as possible to avoid loss of life and to contain costs. To address this concern, the team created a computer model that analyzes factors such as possible demand, cost, and the trade-offs associated with in-house production versus outsourcing, providing the data needed to develop the most efficient logistical solution possible. The team includes Anna Nagurney, the John F. Smith Memorial Professor of Operations Management, and Min Yu, a doctoral student in management science at the Isenberg School.

NSF Grants $360K for Environmental Justice Research

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