



## **These children need your help -- *let's find a cure!***



*Derik with Percy*

exciting research proposals that will take us farther down this path.

Two of the children pictured on this page are the first in their family ever to have VHL. They did not inherit the VHL alteration, but it occurred nonetheless, as a disease of childhood. All these children except Amy have VHL. All four of the affected children have had VHL issues as early as age four.

These are the faces of a new generation of children with VHL. They need our help -- to find better ways to diagnose and treat VHL, and prevent future tumors.

These children have something else very special in common -- they are all working to raise money to cure VHL. Alex and Amy and their family raised \$10,000 this year in one fundraising event, which was matched.

What can *you* do to help?



*Caleb and Chloe*

diagnosis, treatment and quality of life for those affected by von Hippel-Lindau disease: The Board helps to steward the goals and mission of the organization; the organization informs and supports our members; we collaborate with our affiliates around the world to bring researchers and physicians together at events like the Symposium; we fund research and encourage others to enter this fascinating area of science; and our members contribute their time, their money and now their tissues to assist researchers in their work.

It takes the time, talent, and effort of all our members – families, friends, physicians, and researchers – to improve the lives of those affected by this disease around the world.

Together we will find more treatments. Fourteen years ago, we had no idea there was this much we could learn. Now we look forward with hope, knowing we have only just begun. ***Please help us cure VHL.*** -- Bruce S. Weinberg, J.D., Chairman of the Board

We need your help to find the cure. The pace of research is picking up. Every week there is something new in the news that will have implications for treatment of VHL -- just not quite yet. There is work to do in "translating" the basic research into treatments, testing those treatments for safety and effectiveness, and then getting them approved for VHL. But this year we received a number of



*Alex with his sister Amy*

Recently I was privileged to attend our 7th Biennial Medical Symposium on VHL in London, Ontario, Canada, hosted by our Canadian affiliate, the University of Western Ontario, and the Robarts Research Institute. Speakers and attendees from twelve countries shared ideas, reported progress, and planned new initiatives. The hallmark of this meeting was collaboration.

My cousin, who is affected by VHL called to thank me for my work on the Board of VHLFA. I replied that I was lucky to work with such a talented and diverse Board, and hardworking executive director and staff. She said that while the disease has stretched her budget, she was interested in working with us to organize a fundraiser. She had also just registered to be part of the new tissue banking program, and was instilling the importance of vigilance in her daughter, who has an angioma on her optic nerve.

In this one example, I saw how all of us are working together to improve



# Researchers you are supporting 2006-2007

Of the many proposals we received this year, the Research Advisory Board recommended and the Board of Directors approved funding of these three. We looked in particular for efforts that will bring new treatments to patients in the near term.

Most of us know about vaccinations that protect us from infectious diseases like polio and smallpox, but is it possible to be vaccinated against cancer? Or can we use cancer vaccines to treat existing disease? Vaccines work by introducing the infectious agent to the body to help the body develop its own defenses against the agent. Ironically, cancer deceives the immune system into thinking they are not dangerous, so that the body does not mount its full defenses.

**Dr. Don Bellgrau of the University of Colorado in Denver**, with his collaborators Richard Duke and



Alex Franzusoff, has developed a method for tricking the immune system into seeing a dangerous situation worthy of its full defensive action. This full response then causes the body to destroy the tumor. With grant funding from

VHLFA, Dr. Bellgrau will provide proof of the principle that individualized vaccines can be made for specific VHL mutation types, and develop a preclinical roadmap for the rapid use of this approach to treat renal cell carcinoma in humans.

**Dr. George V. Thomas of University of California Los Angeles** is focusing on the use of



CCI-779 (also called temsirolimus, or "Torisel" by Wyeth), an inhibitor of mTOR tyrosine kinase, to stop kidney cancer tumors. While this drug shows promise in the lab, only about ten percent of the humans in the clinical trials saw significant slowing of tumor growth.

Dr. Thomas' group recently demonstrated that human kidney cancer cells with loss of *VHL* dramatically respond to mTOR inhibitors, thereby providing a molecular explanation for the patient responses. Dr. Thomas will study the differences in

response, correlate them with the VHL mutation type and other HIF-regulated genes in the patient's genome, and learn how to predict in advance whether a patient is likely to respond to mTOR inhibitor therapy. He is also studying various other ways of measuring response, including PET scanning and markers in blood and urine.

**Dr. Susanne Schlisio of the Dana-Farber Cancer Research Institute in Boston**, with funding



from VHLFA, proposes to study the key to development of pheochromocytomas ("pheos"). Pheos arise from the same primitive cells that give rise to parts of the nervous system. These primitive cells are sometimes referred to as 'neural crest' cells. Some families are

at high risk for developing Pheos (in the adrenals) or Paragangliomas (outside the adrenals) because they have alterations in specific genes (*VHL*, *SDH*, *NF1*). We recently discovered that these genes all play essential roles in determining whether neural crest cells live or die. In particular, when these genes are mutated, neural crest cells *that should have died as part of the normal development of the fetus* escape their death sentence and go on to cause tumor development later in life. We also showed that a gene called 'Egln3' (pronounced "eggelin3") plays a critical role in this process. Egln3 promotes the death of neural crest cells whereas inhibiting Egln3 function has the opposite effect.

Dr. Schlisio and her colleagues have since learned that activating Egln3 kills pheo cells and other neural crest-derived tumors. In contrast Egln3 does not cause cell death in other types of cancer they have examined to date. In short, Egln3 appears to play a special role in the decision between life and death for neural crest tumors such as Pheos. They are trying to understand the mechanisms by which Egln3 causes cell death because this understanding might, in time, allow us to induce pheo cells to die in patients, which would shrink existing tumors or prevent new pheos.

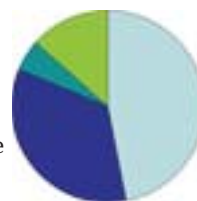
*Thank you for your support of these projects!*

## Teamwork for Health

To support the work of the many researchers studying VHL, people with VHL can make the most important gift of all. Tissue removed during surgery is critically needed to find a cure. Call or write to the VHL Tissue Bank to give permission to deposit surgically removed tissue in the Bank, and help speed the day when we will have a cure for VHL. *Thank you!* write to [bank@vhl.org](mailto:bank@vhl.org) or phone 800-222-6374 ext. 251 or see <http://vhl.org/bank>

## Report for Fiscal 2006 (ended June 30, 2006)

Total Revenue for Fiscal 2006 was \$261,923. Of this, \$117,623 was allocated to the Research program.



*Of our Expenses:*  
 Research - \$117,623 (46.5%)  
 Education & Support - \$88,505 (35.0%)  
 Fundraising - \$13,636 (5.4%)  
 Management - \$33,136 (13.1%)

*Please help us cure VHL!*



## Challenge! Your Gift Goes Farther!

Two families have challenged you to make a special pledge to VHLFA this season.

Special thanks go to Sunny Greene and the Lusk Family for their generous Challenge Grants! See page 4 to learn how you can help us earn these challenge gifts ... and choose a special thank-you gift for yourself.

## Volunteers of the Year 2006

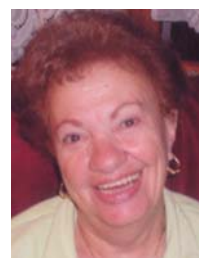
VHL Family Alliance would not exist without our many dedicated volunteers. Our volunteers are the heart of what we do. Their skills, dedication, motivation and energy are what makes the VHL Family Alliance vibrant and present throughout the world. It is with great pleasure that we honor our Volunteers of the Year 2006: Tom Rodenberg, Evelyn Werner, Chris Hendrickx, and Susi Martínez.



**Tom Rodenberg** has been with us since 1994, chairing the Insurance and Legal Committee. He served as a Director of VHLFA 1994-97. He rejoined the Board in 2000-06, and served as Chairman of the Board 2004-2006.

After Tom graduated from law school in 1989 he used his training to practice in the areas of employment discrimination, civil rights, personal injury, civil litigation and insurance claims. Since 2004 he has been the General Counsel of his local school district.

We honor Tom for his nine years of service on the Board, and especially for his gentle strength and wise counsel as Chairman.



**Evelyn Werner** is about as dedicated as they come. Evelyn and her husband Bob have attended nearly every VHLFA meeting since 1994! Evelyn, who has VHL, is one of the kind voices you will reach on the other end when you call our hotline. Evelyn says she is "thrilled" to be able to be on the hotline to help and get to know people from all over the United States and Canada. When people call they often have little or no information on VHL. Evelyn provides information and support to them, lending a warm listening ear. She does this work in memory of the two sons she lost to VHL. Evelyn has been with us for over a decade and we look forward to continuing to work

with her in the years to come.

**Chris Hendrickx** chairs our affiliate in Belgium, which she founded in 1994. She has done a great deal to support others with VHL in Belgium, and to raise the visibility of VHL in Belgium, working with doctors in the Flemish-speaking sector of the country. French-speaking doctors are served out of France.



Chris is fluent in English, Flemish, Dutch, German and French. She attends the Dutch and German meetings, participates in the German and English online support groups, and helps to keep these groups in communication with one another. She is translating the Handbook into Flemish. We honor Chris for her hard work and dedication, and for the many people she has helped to find hope and service in Belgium.

**Jesusa "Susi" Martínez-Gomez** is President of our affiliate group in Spain, Alianza Española de Familias de von Hippel-Lindau. She provides telephone support in Spain, and via e-mail supports others with VHL in Spain and Spanish-speaking countries throughout the world.



One of her colleagues wrote, "What I admire most about Susi is her warmth, endless optimism...diplomacy and persistence, she achieves all that she sets out to do!" She has applied these qualities in building the support organization in Spain, including a beautiful website and regional meetings. She has inspired many people to participate in Alianza Española de Familias de von Hippel-Lindau, even physicians in hospitals that are far away. She manages all of this despite her decreasing vision. She continues to hope that there will one day be a cure for VHL.

"Sometimes," said Dr. Karina Villar, "I think that this disease is a blessing in that it brings out the best in the people that it touches". We celebrate the courage and kindness of these four outstanding volunteers, who are outstanding examples of the many volunteers who make up this Alliance.

I just listened to Keith Richards' song "Staples" on the VHL website, and I just have to say that he has Truly got some MAD SKILLZ! Seriously, it was so inspirational and incredibly SWEET, especially the reference to his Mother. My mother has battled a series of brain tumors my whole life. Yet I've never known a stronger, more lovable, caring and most importantly HUMOROUS person in this entire world. She is truly the definition of a SURVIVOR! So I definitely understand your LOVE and admiration for your MOM! You truly made me feel better already, just by listening to your song. - Love, a Fan and fellow VHL member, thanx for the boost to my spirit. - *Jennifer H., Toronto, Ontario, Canada.*

## Your Donation Goes Even Farther!

Thanks to the generous support of the Greene and Lusk families, your donation this season will go even farther!

Sunny Greene and the Lusk family have challenged us. They will match all contributions of \$100 or more that we receive by December 31, 2006, up to a total of \$20,000. Please help us earn these wonderful donations!

We're offering you something you can't buy at any price -- life-saving information to help you stay healthy with VHL, and targeted research projects working for a cure for VHL.

Special blue wristbands are available on request for your donation of at least \$5 each. In the spirit of living strong, they proudly proclaim "Hope ... Strength ... vhl.org"

**Gifts of the Artists:** Several talented members of our community have donated CDs and books. For a donation of \$150 or more, you can choose one of these wonderful performances as your free gift.

**Thank you!**

**\*\* Write in the item number on your donation form.**

1. New York Times Best-Selling book, "How Full is Your Bucket?" by Donald O. Clifton and Tom Rath, Gallup Press
2. CD, Bach, "Goldberg Variations" for Piano, by Pierre Jacomet
3. Music CD, "Forever In His Care," by Deb Hogan
4. Music CD, "Wayfaring Stranger," by Clenton Winford II



Mail to: VHLFA, 2001 Beacon St, Ste 208, Boston, MA 02135-7787 USA

or Canadian VHLFA, 4227 Hamilton Rd., Dorchester, ON N0L 1G3

Enclosed is my tax-deductible gift to support: ☐ VHLFA ☐ Research only

- ☐ \$25 ☐ \$50 ☐ \$100 ☐ \$150 ☐ \$500 ☐ \$1000 ☐ \$\_\_\_\_\_
- ☐ My employer will match my donation. I have enclosed the necessary forms.
- ☐ Please send me \_\_\_\_\_ VHL wristbands (minimum donation \$5 each).
- ☐ Gifts of \$100 or more will be matched by the Greene and Lusk families.
- ☐ With my gift of \$150 or more, please send me item # \_\_\_\_\_ above \*\*

(Please make checks payable to VHL Family Alliance)

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☐ Send newsletter

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VHLFA is a non-profit corporation in the U.S. and a registered Charity in Canada

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