

PRESS RELEASE

Festive opening of the Institute of Molecular Biology at Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz

Minister-President Kurt Beck / Minister of Science Doris Ahnen: „A beacon for science and a showpiece for Rhineland-Palatinate“

Professor Christof Niehrs: „An innovative institute that conducts research at the highest international level“

Mainz, 11 March 2011 Although it has not been in existence for long, it is already a success story: after a construction time of only 15 months, the Institute of Molecular Biology gGmbH (IMB) at Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz (JGU), Germany, is ready to start work. Construction of this state-of-the-art research centre began in December 2009 with the official ground-breaking ceremony. It was an impressive demonstration of successful cooperation between the public sector and a private foundation: the Boehringer Ingelheim Foundation will be funding research operations at IMB to the tune of €100 million over a period of ten years, while the state of Rhineland-Palatinate provided €45.5 million for construction of the institute. "The generous support of the Boehringer Ingelheim Foundation has provided Rhineland-Palatinate with a new showpiece in the form of the Institute of Molecular Biology. We have demonstrated that we can turn innovative ideas into reality within a very short time. I hope that the IMB will be equally successful," said Minister-President of the federal state of Rhineland-Palatinate, Kurt Beck. Minister of Science Doris Ahnen is convinced of the sustainability of the new research centre: "The IMB was not only established in record time but also promises to become a global beacon for basic research - a hub between biology and medicine. I am convinced that the institute will provide major advances in life science research - here in our country and also within the context of international research."

Best conditions for cutting-edge research

Professor Christof Niehrs, Founding Director of the IMB, has ambitious goals: "The IMB provides the most modern technologies and facilities that will enable our scientists to conduct research at an international world-class level. Linking the institute to Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz allows us to create synergies with other fields." Research at the Institute of Molecular Biology will concentrate on three fields: molecular developmental biology investigates how genes control the complex process in which a fertilized egg cell grows into an adult organism. Epigenetics, a relatively young discipline, investigates how genes are controlled, i.e. switched on or off in specific cells, and how genetic activity changes with age or under the influence of diseases. DNA repair research looks for ways of using our body's own endogenous mechanisms to repair the kind of damage to our DNA that could, for example, lead to the development of cancer. The research conducted by Professor Niehrs, who was awarded the prestigious Leibniz Prize in 2003, innovatively combines these three fields. In addition to his own group, he has already managed to attract three other groups to the Institute of Molecular Biology. With the aid of high-resolution microscopy, Professor Christoph Cremer is striving to shed light on the nano-structure of cells. Dr. George Reid's main field is gene expression and he is focusing on discovering when specific genes are active in an organism or in a cell. Dr. Stefan Legewie uses bioinformatics to look at how genes cooperate in regulatory networks.

Otto Boehringer, Chairman of the Board of the Boehringer Ingelheim Foundation, emphasized the dedication of all persons involved: "We are delighted that our idea of donating €100 million for independent top-level research, an idea originally conceived on the occasion of the 125th anniversary of Boehringer Ingelheim, has come to fruition within such a short time. I am impressed by the performance of all participants and cordially thank you for your dedication to this remarkable project. The Boehringer Ingelheim Foundation and the founding family have close bonds with this region and will continue to provide sustainable support of excellent science and research in future."

"The establishment of the Institute of Molecular Biology provides the Mainz research hub with an internationally prominent centre for life sciences," states the President of JGU, Professor Georg Krausch. "The function of the IMB will be to provide a bridge between molecular biology and medicine, and extend and strengthen local know-how by creating scientific synergies between the various disciplines. This new institute strengthens the research infrastructure of the university and offers the scientists at this centre of excellence unusually attractive work opportunities."

Up to 180 jobs to be created at the IMB

Some 12 different groups will be conducting research at the IMB. JGU Chancellor Götz Scholz indicated that up to 180 jobs will be created at the new research centre, which covers approximately 6,000 square meters. Founding Director Niehrs was very impressed with the speed at which the IMB had been constructed: "I want to thank all staff members of the LBB, the estate and construction management agency of Rhineland-Palatinate, for their exceptional efforts without which it would not have been possible to implement this project in record time."

Internet: www.imb-mainz.de

*The **Boehringer Ingelheim Foundation** is a non-profit foundation that focuses on long-term, sustainable support of the biological, chemical, medical and pharmaceutical sciences. It was founded in 1977 by Hubertus Liebrecht (1931–1991), a member of the family that owns the Boehringer Ingelheim corporation. One of the aims of the Boehringer Ingelheim Foundation is to give expression to the close links that exist between the founding family and its region of origin. It has thus always had a particular affinity with Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz.*

*The **Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz (JGU)** has more than 35,000 students from over 130 countries. It is one of the biggest German universities, and it is the academic and scientific hub of the federal state of Rhineland-Palatinate. Approximately 2,900 academics, among them 480 professors, teach and conduct research here in more than 150 institutes and medical departments. www.uni-mainz.de*

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