

## Female Scientists Work To Make Breakthroughs

(NAPSA)—One woman, Dr. Laura Lapham at Florida State University, is studying possible new energy sources at the bottom of the sea. Another woman, Dr. Sandra Ugrina at the University of Maryland, is developing ways to make the next generation of aircraft more fuel efficient by reducing the drag on their wings. And still another, Dr. Sridevi Vedula Sarma at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, is investigating ways to improve treatments for Parkinson's disease.

What these women have in common, in spite of their diverse fields of study, is that they're among an elite group of female scientists whose cutting-edge research is aimed at addressing some of today's toughest scientific challenges. Take Dr. Lapham, for instance. The postdoctoral researcher at FSU's department of oceanography is studying whether deep-sea methane hydrates—crystallized mixtures of hydrocarbon gas and water—could one day be a significant alternative source of energy.

"These hydrates are thought to be the largest reservoir of fossil fuels," says Dr. Lapham.

One other thing all three women have in common? Along with two others—Yale University's Dr. Ania Bleszynski-Jayich, who is testing some tenets of quantum physics; and the University of Pennsylvania's Dr. Sara Aton, who is trying to solve the mystery of how the brain works while we're sleeping—they're also all recent recipients of a prestigious 2008 L'Oréal USA Fellowships For Women in Science award. "Basic research has led to so many important advances," says Dr. Bleszynski-Jayich. "I will be so excited when my research, which explores the world of quirky

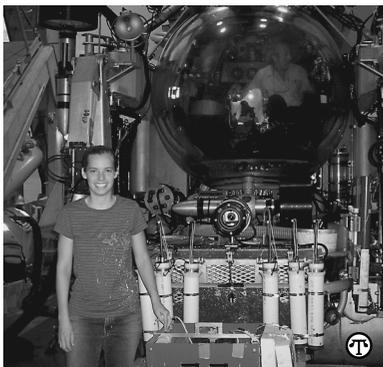


Photo: Jeff Chanton

**Dr. Laura Lapham stands in front of a Pore-Fluid Array instrument, which she helped design to investigate potential undersea energy sources.**

quantum mechanics, will someday be part of a positive impact on society."

The L'Oréal USA Fellowships come at a time when women in science not only remain the exception, but—despite solid evidence to the contrary—face the persistent myth that they're somehow less adept than their male counterparts.

Indeed, in a sign of just how much of a hot-button issue it's become, one university president, Harvard's Lawrence Summers, resigned in 2006 after professors on campus objected to his comment—which Summers claimed was merely intended to spark a lively intellectual debate—that "intrinsic aptitude" could explain why fewer women than men enter science and engineering professions.

Statistics tell at least part of the story: Despite earning half of all science degrees—and constituting half of America's total workforce—women hold just 20 percent of the science jobs in the country. By way of comparison, at L'Oréal, which invested more than \$800 million on research and development last

year, over half of its 3,000-plus researchers are women. Laurent Attal, L'Oréal USA's president and CEO, is adamant about encouraging female scientists.

"We believe the world needs science and science needs women," he says. Dr. Ralph J. Cicerone, president of the National Academy of Sciences, agrees. "A diverse scientific community produces more cutting-edge research, which is essential to solving some of the world's most complex problems," he adds.

To that end, L'Oréal USA also sponsors a "For Girls in Science" effort that provides hands-on, after-school programs meant to inspire girls in science, technology, engineering and math.

Who knows, maybe one of those girls will play her own part in helping to reduce fuel consumption or assisting many of the nearly 40,000 Americans diagnosed with Parkinson's disease each year. Should that happen, they'll likely praise their families and mentors for their help and guidance, just as the winners of this year's L'Oréal USA Fellowships For Women in Science did.

"Mentorship is a key strategy to encourage women in science," says Dr. Aton. "When you come to a point in your career and life where you have to make tough decisions, having someone who can give you good advice will get you through."

And family support plays a vital role, too—even more so for someone like Dr. Bleszynski-Jayich, whose parents are physicists. While some kids call home to ask at what temperature to bake a lasagna, Dr. Bleszynski-Jayich calls to chat about negative index of refraction materials. And then she asks about lasagna.

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