



## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### **Cornell graduate students, Maryann Borsick Herman and Megan Dewdney receive Robert M. Gilmer Award**

by Joe Ogrodnick

Geneva, NY: Maryann Borsick Herman and Megan Dewdney, both Cornell graduate students in the Department of Plant Pathology at Cornell's New York State Agricultural Experiment Station (NYSAES) in Geneva, NY, were recently named co-recipients of the Robert M. Gilmer award for 2007. The Gilmer Award is presented annually in recognition of excellence in research, teaching, and service to the department.

Gilmer, who endowed the award through his estate, was a faculty member in Plant Pathology from 1950 to 1975 and chaired the department from 1967 to 1972. He is fondly remembered for his intelligence and great breadth of knowledge of plant diseases, and for being a free thinker who challenged conventional views. Gilmer was known internationally for his research on virus diseases of deciduous tree fruits and grapes.

"I could not be more pleased with the progress that Maryann has made during the time she has been in my program," said Chris Smart, assistant professor of plant pathology, in her introductory remarks. "She has done an excellent job of gaining insight into how plant activators work." (Plant activators, explained Smart, are compounds that induce a plant's own resistance against pests; while several of these products are commercially available, they are not widely used by growers in New York.)

"Maryann is utilizing molecular tools to understand when plant defenses are turned on in tomatoes in the field, and the results will enable us to understand when it might be appropriate to utilize these plant activators. This project nicely bridges the gap between basic and applied science," said Smart.

"She is well deserving of the Gilmer Award," Smart went on to say. "I am truly fortunate to have her as a graduate student in my program, and am confident that she will make outstanding contributions to the field for years to come."

"Megan has a very strong academic and research record at Cornell," said Herb Aldwinckle, Dewdney's major professor. "Her research for the Ph.D. is being done in two phases, in statistical and then biological studies related to the epidemiology of fire blight, a bacterial disease of apple trees." Aldwinckle pointed out that Dewdney already has a Phytopathology paper in press on her statistical comparison of the accuracy of two systems for forecasting fire blight, MARYBLYT and Cougarblight.

"Her biological work is directed toward improved understanding of temperature, flower age and varietal effects on the growth of *Erwinia amylovora* bacterial cells on the stigmas of apple blossoms, and she is also looking at how well MARYBLYT really predicts the growth of *E. amylovora* on the stigmas," Aldwinckle went on to say. "Her results are already providing new insight into these phenomena, which have been assumed but not studied experimentally, despite the long history of fire blight research. Her work is likely to cause significant changes in the tools we use to manage fire blight. She is indeed a very worthy recipient of the Robert Gilmer Award."

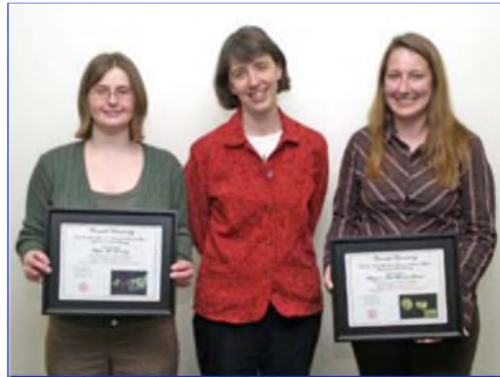
The two students have received a number of grants and other awards from both Cornell and the American Phytopathological Society.

As part of the day's events, a seminar was presented by Dr. Francis Trail, a former Geneva Plant Pathology graduate student who is currently at Michigan State University.

Both Dewdney and Borsick Herman were presented with framed certificates commemorating the event, and their names were inscribed on a plaque on permanent display in the Plant Pathology seminar room.

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Pictures are linked to hi-res scans



(left to right) Megan Dewdney, Francis Trail and Maryann Borsick Herman  
Credit: J. Ogrodnick – NYSAES, Cornell University

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