



## SCIENCE AND DESERT FEELINGS

### THE 6<sup>TH</sup> GERMAN ISRAELI CANCER RESEARCH SCHOOL



*Science and desert feelings.*

The 6th German Israeli Cancer Research School on *Mouse Models of Human Cancer* focused on the most critical bottleneck in the advancement of basic tumor biology and translational research: the availability of suitable preclinical animal tumor models that better mimic the human pathology of cancer. The German-Israeli Cooperation fosters scientific cooperations between DKFZ scientists

and Israeli cancer researchers. This year's winter school was jointly organized by Hellmut Augustin (DKFZ, Heidelberg) and Eli Pikarsky (Hebrew University, Jerusalem).

Eight speakers from Israel, six speakers from Germany, which are all members of the Helmholtz Alliance Preclinical Comprehensive Cancer Center (PCCC) and 26 young scientists (students and junior postdocs) met at Mitzpe Ramon in the middle of the Negev Desert for three intense and stimulating days of scientific exchange and development of new ideas. The participants highly appreciated that Otmar Wiestler, Chairman and Scientific Director of the German Cancer Research Center had joined the meeting for two days to engage in discussions about the latest developments in this rapidly moving field of ongoing cancer research. He emphasized the importance and success of the German-Israeli Cooperation, which promotes intense scientific cooperation and friendship between cancer researchers of both countries.



*Birthday surprise for Klaus Rajewsky.*

The event provided the young scientists with the unique opportunity to meet some of the key opinion leaders in the field in the informal setting of a small workshop. Among others, the list of speakers included PCCC member Klaus Rajewsky, whose group has as early as 1994 established the feasibility and power of the Cre-lox recombination system for conditional gene targeting *in vivo* (Gu et al., *Science*). This technique has revolutionized preclinical mouse models and is nowadays used by hundreds of laboratories around the world.

The scientific program of the Cancer Research School focused on three tumor entities: gastrointestinal tumors, brain tumors and hematological malignancies and covered the cutting-edge research topics in the field. Tumors are now widely recognized not just as a clump of tumor cells, but as a neoplastically growing organ, consisting of tumor cells, host-derived stroma and recruited immune cells. This was reflected by the number of contributions covering the topic tumor microenvironment. Likewise, advanced models for deciphering the role of cancer stem cells and longevity in tumorigenesis were presented. Last but not least a plethora of preclinical mouse models for various therapy approaches were discussed.



A further highlight was the keynote lecture by Uri Alon, who is not only known as a very successful systems biologist, but also as an outstanding entertainer. Using simple flip chart lectures and his guitar, he spread his ideas about empathy in science to the upper echelons of scientific institutions around the world (for more information see: "Sunday in the Lab" <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yhncg6GXYq8>).



*Guitar talk by Uri Alon.*



*Winners of the „Grant Writing Competition“. From left to right: Sami Stalin, Stefan Eser, Polina Weitzenfeld, Neta Erez, Yeal Ben-Nun, Deian Yuan.*

The organization of this year's school incorporated two novel program points: Student speakers selected by the organizing team presented research short talks. A second novelty was a "grant writing competition". Students could choose between different topics which were proposed by the invited speakers. With support of their mentor, the students presented their proposal in a 10 min talk which was discussed and evaluated by a panel of reviewers. This educative game was not only a great challenge but also a lot of fun for all participants. The students and postdocs were extremely curious, open to new ideas and the meeting was a great think tank for scientific exchange. Besides

the intense scientific program, there was ample time to enjoy the social activities. The walk for the sunrise at the Makhtesh Ramon crater rim was as impressive, as the trip through the crater, where the group enjoyed an incredible sunset. The winter school in Mitzpe Ramon is a great example that such events are more than worthwhile. The organizers got an overwhelming feedback from junior and the senior participants. Notably, the selection of talks and the grant writing competition have been highly appreciated. The participants surely returned with a lot of new ideas and plenty of impressions from this exceptional winter school.



*Poster prizes were awarded to Shlomi Finkin, Dharanija Madhavan and Ayelet Jerafi-Vider. Left to right: Eli Pikarsky, Peter Angel, Dharanija Madhavan, Ayelet Jerafi-Vider, Varda Rotter, Hellmut Augustin.*