LA JOLLA INSTITUTE RANKS NUMBER ONE IN WORLD’S “BEST PLACES TO WORK” IN SCIENCE
Recognition marks second top ranking this year for best research workplace

SAN DIEGO – (August 8, 2013) La Jolla Institute for Allergy and Immunology has been ranked as the Number 1 best place to work in the worldwide academic research community, according to survey results announced by The Scientist magazine.

La Jolla Institute scored highest in The Scientist’s 2013 “Best Places to Work in Academia” survey and was joined in the “Top Ten” by such major research institutions as the University of Pittsburgh at number 4, St. Jude Children’s Research Hospital at number 7, and Scripps Institution of Oceanography at number 8.

This first place finish comes on the heels of La Jolla Institute’s rank as number 2 in the “Best Places to Work for Postdocs,” The Scientist’s national survey of postdoctoral researchers, who are junior-level scientists in training, announced in April.

The survey results put La Jolla Institute in the unusual position of garnering two of the top research workplace rankings for 2013. President and Chief Scientific Officer Mitchell Kronenberg, Ph.D., was extremely pleased. “I think our collaborative atmosphere and the quality of our science are absolutely central to being regarded as a great place to work,” he says, noting that the Institute is recognized as one of the top medical research organizations in the world, based on its highly cited immunology research.

More than 1,200 full-time life scientists working in academic or noncommercial research institutions worldwide participated in the “Best Places to Work in Academia” survey, covering topics such as scientific excellence, research resources, and job satisfaction. In the same survey in 2012, the Institute earned the number 6 ranking, while landing at number 7 in the 2012 postdoc survey.
“After doing well in other years, it is rewarding to know that we reached our highest rankings in this year’s competition. We finished on top,” says Stephen Wilson, Ph.D., an immunologist and Institute Executive Vice President.

Faculty members interviewed cited the Institute’s friendly atmosphere, strong institutional support, excellent infrastructure, and accessible executive leadership as some of the Institute’s pluses. “It’s a supportive environment from the top down,” says Michael Croft, Ph.D.

Amnon Altman, Ph.D., director of scientific affairs and a 23-year faculty member, says he believes the Institute’s management style, in particular the leadership of President Mitch Kronenberg, has a lot to do with the Number 1 ranking. “Mitch listens to and carefully considers employee ideas and concerns,” says Altman. “Everyone working here feels they are an important part of the overall operation. There is an atmosphere of mutual respect.”

Sonia Sharma, Ph.D., scientific director of the Institute’s RNA interference (RNAi Center) and the newest faculty member, had similar sentiments, describing a “highly proactive” and “progressive” work environment devoid of the old-fashioned hierarchy seen at some research institutions.

“At every level, people are working together,” says Sharma. “It’s highly interactive and collaborative and this energizes bigger ideas.”

Alessandro Sette, Ph.D., also cites the collegial environment. “You don’t feel like different labs are trying to advance their own agenda,” says Sette. “But rather people are generally trying to help each other out.”

This leads to tremendous openness and sharing of ideas that spurs innovation, particularly in light of the Institute’s dedicated focus on the immune system, say scientists. “There is a tremendous capital of smart people doing interesting things in the same general area,” says Sette.

“We are all aware of what everyone is working on,” adds Altman, who notes it’s common to see scientists laughing, talking and trading scientific insights in the hallways. “We share information and we gain from each other’s experiences. You have some of the brightest minds in immunology all in one building. The cross-pollination of ideas is a big part of our research innovation and our collegial spirit.”
The Institute’s relatively small size is also a plus, say scientists. At 350 employees, the Institute does not endeavor to be as large as many of its scientific peers. Its research staff includes more than 150 Ph.D.s and M.D.s., who join the Institute from countries around the world. “We reside in what we think of as a 'Goldie-locks' zone; not too small to have resources and diversity, but not so large that we exclude people or that improvements and aspirations get lost in bureaucracy,” says Wilson. “Our size keeps us very agile.”

It also promotes interaction – a situation fueled by the Institute’s open design that can be seen from its laboratories to its lunch room. The Institute also boasts an innovative employee wellness program that provides free exercise, stress reduction and nutrition classes along with healthier on-site food choices. A renovated lunchroom with picnic style benches, comfortable outdoor tables, and plenty of seating also encourages conversation and camaraderie.

“We believe that healthier, happier employees are more passionate about coming to work and making a difference,” says Kronenberg. “In a research environment focused on conducting great science, that’s an invaluable asset.”

The following is the list of the top 20 “Best Places to Work in Academia” based on the survey by The Scientist. The Scientist is a professional magazine for life scientists that reports on trends in research and technology.

The top 20:

1. La Jolla Institute for Allergy and Immunology
2. Blood Systems Research Institute, San Francisco
3. Stowers Institute for Medical Research, Kansas City, MO
4. University of Pittsburgh, PA
5. Carnegie Institution for Science, Dpt. of Plant Biology, Stanford, CA
6. St. Jude Children’s Research Hospital, Memphis, TN
7. Fox Chase Cancer Center, Philadelphia, PA
8. Scripps Institution of Oceanography
9. ECRI Institute, Plymouth Meeting, PA
10. Oklahoma Medical Research Foundation, Oklahoma City, OK
11. Van Andel Institute, Grand Rapids, MI
12. Stanford University, CA
13. Massachusetts General Hospital, Boston, MA
14. Institute for Systems Biology, Seattle, WA
15. Roswell Park Cancer Institute, Buffalo, NY
16. Boston Children’s Hospital, MA
17. Brigham and Women’s Hospital, Boston, MA
18. University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, NC
19. University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI
20. The Ohio State University, Columbus, OH

About La Jolla Institute
Founded in 1988, La Jolla Institute for Allergy and Immunology is a nonprofit, independent biomedical research institute focused on improving human health through increased understanding of the immune system. Its scientists carry out research seeking new knowledge leading to the prevention of disease through vaccines and the treatment and cure of infectious diseases, cancer, inflammatory, and autoimmune diseases such as rheumatoid arthritis, type 1 (juvenile) diabetes, Crohn’s disease and asthma. La Jolla Institute’s research staff includes more than 150 Ph.D.s and M.D.s. To learn more about the Institute’s work, visit www.lji.org.

###