



ESA Newsletter



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Introducing the Nan-Yao Su Award for Innovation and Creativity in Entomology

Dr. Nan-Yao Su, a professor of entomology at the University of Florida, has donated \$250,000 to ESA for the establishment of an endowment to award creative entomologists who have demonstrated the ability to find alternative solutions to problems that significantly impact entomology. Each year, the interest from the \$250,000 will be presented to the winner of ESA's newest award, the Nan-Yao Su Award for Innovation and Creativity in Entomology.

Dr. Su got the idea after meeting the family of another University of Florida professor, Dr. Robert Cade, who invented the Gatorade sports drink, among other accomplishments.

"I was supposed to meet [Dr. Cade] at a conference in March, 2008, but unfortunately he passed away in November, 2007," Dr. Su said in an interview. "But I did meet his family and learned that they are planning a museum to honor his accomplishments, and to showcase and encourage innovations and creativities. As I went over the materials for preparing the museum with the family, I was very much inspired by the idea."

Dr. Su's own creativity helped him come up with an innovative solution to termite problems, the Sentricon System, which has been marketed in 18 countries since 1995 to protect over two million homes, and has reduced pesticide use by more than 6,000 metric tons. The system has also been used widely in historic monuments such as the Statue of Liberty National Monument, San Cristobal and El Morro in Puerto Rico, and Ft. Christiansvaern in the U.S. Virgin Islands.

"There are already many 'field-specific' ESA professional awards," said Dr. Su. "But I thought it would be a great addition to establish an award to identify and honor innovative works accomplished by creative individuals. To honor what's been done, however, is only half of my objective. I've listed the selection criteria to identify innovative works and creative individuals. My hope is that, after reading the criteria, some may be encouraged to apply the process of creative thinking to come up with innova-



Dr. Nan-Yao Su

for the award.

"Innovative works and creative individuals are found everywhere," Dr. Su said. "This award is meant to identify such individuals, to honor their works, and to further encourage such approaches, regardless of their fields. Innovations are often most apparent in research activities, but we really should not limit ourselves to research only. There are many unique and challenging problems in extension and teaching that require innovative solutions. Instead of limiting the award to another specialized field, I thought we should have one that cuts across all fields pursued by ESA members."

The only requirements are that candidates must be able to demonstrate in-depth knowledge of their fields of study, an ability to identify problems of significant importance (especially problems which have been overlooked by many in the past), an ability to recognize a novel pattern from existing information, the ability to develop alternative solutions or divergent thinking for a problem (in other words, to be able to "think outside the box"), and the ability to connect thoughts that previously have been isolated. Candidates should also display personality traits such as intellectual curiosity, openness to new information and experiences, tolerance of ambiguity, love of problem solving, passion, objectivity and honesty in judging their own work, and a willingness to take risks.

Although Dr. Su himself is an internationally recognized scientist, a leading expert on

termites, and an ESA Fellow, he still strongly

encourages young people to question authority even as they learn from the work of their predecessors. "Of the many branches of scientific fields, biology demands accumulation of a large amount of information before we can be good at it," he said. "While many of us enjoy acquiring such information, the process can be so overwhelming that many are bogged down by it. We learn a lot from people before us, but at some point we need to rebel. Nothing is etched in stone, and a young entomologist needs to question and challenge the establishment."

Similarly, when asked about the advice he would give to young entomologists, Dr. Su encouraged them to retain their natural inquisitiveness even as they undergo the daily pressures associated with work and studying.

"Entomologists are some of the very lucky few who are allowed to keep their childhood curiosity. The schooling and demands from our daily work may sometimes force us to 'grow up,' but we should not forget the childhood amazement we all experienced when we marveled over, for example, the wing venation of an insect. That perceptive and imaginative mind drove most us to our professions, and we need to go back to that foundation."

More information on the Nan-Yao Su Award for Innovation and Creativity in Entomology, including eligibility requirements, nomination procedures, and evaluation criteria, can be found online at <http://www.ent.soc.org/awards/professional/nan-yao-su.htm>.

As for all ESA professional awards, the nomination deadline for this one is July 1, 2009.

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