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Jefferson neuroscience receives \$500K gift for new Stem Cell Center

Donation made by the Strauss Foundation to commemorate the late Robert Perry Strauss

By: Michael Tanenbaum

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Jefferson's **Vickie and Jack Farber Institute for Neuroscience** announced this week that it **received a \$500,000 gift** that will go toward the construction of a new Stem Cell Center for research into neurodegenerative diseases.

The donation came from Kimberly Strauss and the Strauss Foundation to commemorate her late father Robert Perry Strauss, who was born at Jefferson and worked as an executive for Pep Boys Auto Stores, which his father co-founded in 1921.

Raised in Merion, Strauss was an All-Philadelphia basketball star at Episcopal Academy and later attended Duke University, where he was named All-Southern Conference under legendary coach Red Auerbach. The multi-talented Strauss also went on to star in a Hollywood production of 'Hamlet' before dedicating his later years to philanthropy.

Kimberly Strauss said the donation is meant to celebrate her father's life from beginning to end while helping to make a difference in the lives of others who can benefit from advances in stem cell research.

"On behalf of the Strauss Foundation, I am enormously proud to make this donation to Jefferson in honor of my late father whose enterprising and compassionate spirit are emblematic of this organization's ambitious drive into neuroscientific



At the recent Robert Perry Strauss Memorial Lobby naming and portrait unveiling ceremony are (L to R) Robert Rosenwasser, MD, Jewell L. Osterholm, MD, Professor and Chair of the Department of Neurological Surgery and President, Vickie and Jack Farber Institute for Neuroscience; Lorraine Iacovitti, PhD; Abdolmohamad Rostami, MD, PhD, Chair, Neurology; Irwin Levitan, PhD, Paul C. Brucker Professor and Chair, Department of Neuroscience; Michael J. Vergare, MD, Executive Vice President, Partnerships and Affiliations/Professor and Chair, Psychiatry; Stephen K. Klasko, MD, MBA, President and CEO, Thomas Jefferson University and Jefferson Health; and Kimberly Strauss. Photo: TJU Photo Services

research," said Ms. Strauss.

The new Stem Cell Center will be led by **Dr. Lorraine Iacovitti**, whose research focuses on treating neurodegenerative conditions such as Parkinson's Disease. Her lab examines how neurons differentiate into dopamine neurons during development of the brain and seeks to create neuroprotective strategies to treat Parkinson's Disease. Her team also recently expanded studies on stem cells to explore their potential use in treating stroke, the third leading cause of death in the United States.

"These generous funds will enable us to advance our initiatives on personalized treatments for an array of conditions of the nervous system, including Parkinson's, Alzheimer's, ALS, Huntington's, multiple sclerosis, stroke, traumatic brain injury and spinal cord injury," said Dr. Iacovitti.

In recognition of the gift, Jefferson renamed the lobby of its Health Professions Academic Building – located at 901 Walnut St. – in Mr. Strauss' honor.