



MONELL CHEMICAL SENSES CENTER

Advancing Discovery in Taste and Smell

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MONELL'S HISTORY: Advancing Discovery in Taste and Smell Since 1968

In the 1960s, very little was understood about the essential mechanisms and functions of what were thought to be the “minor senses” – taste and smell. As a junior professor in the veterinary school at Cornell, Dr. Morley Kare became increasingly interested in this field as he investigated food choice in a variety of species. With encouragement from the government (e.g., the National Science Foundation and the Veterans Affairs Administration) and from several corporate leaders, Dr. Kare envisioned a multi-disciplinary scientific institute dedicated to the study of these senses that are central to human health and well being.

In 1967, The Ambrose Monell Foundation made an initial pledge of \$1 million to create the Monell Chemical Senses Center, with Dr. Kare as director. After consulting with several universities, Dr. Kare, the directors of the Monell Foundation, and administrators at the University of Pennsylvania agreed that Penn would be the ideal location for such a research institute.

The organization of the Center was unusual for the times; it began as a joint venture involving academic, government, and industry scientists, when such collaborations were rare.

The Center was first housed in the old Lippincott Publications bindery building owned by Penn at 25th and Locust Streets. In 1971, Monell moved into its current home at 3500 Market Street, initially occupying just two of the building's six floors.

Early in Monell's history, Dr. Kare said, “Monell itself is a scientific experiment.” The results of this experiment have surpassed hopes and expectations. From a fledgling organization, Monell has grown to be a major force in scientific research, addressing issues such as human flavor and fragrance perception, nutrition and diet, obesity and metabolic disease, population regulation, homeland security, environmental chemical exposure, and pollution effects.

Monell's growth was rapid, and in 1978 the Monell Center separated from Penn to become an independent nonprofit research institute. The two institutions continue to maintain a close relationship.

The Center, now with approximately 60 Ph.D.-level scientists, fully occupies the 60,000 sq.ft. 3500 Market building and has purchased and is expanding into adjacent property.

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From the start, Monell's science took a true multidisciplinary approach. Academic institutions traditionally are organized by disciplines into autonomous departments that often do not readily communicate with each other. For-profit research facilities tend to investigate specific areas of biochemical, molecular, or behavioral research in a somewhat autonomous fashion. In contrast, everything possible is done to ensure that Monell scientists – psychologists, biologists, chemists, neuroscientists, geneticists and others – can and will collaborate toward the common objective of understanding the chemical senses. The Center has no departmental structure; its laboratories and offices generally are not segregated by discipline, and most importantly its staff is imbued with the ideal of multidisciplinary interaction.

An integral part of Monell's mission has always been preparation of the next generation of scientists through pre-doctoral and post-doctoral training programs. Since 1969, more than 300 PhD-level scientists have been trained at Monell. Most of these trainees now continue to contribute to the field through their work in academia, industry and government. The Center's highly successful high school and college internship program introduces younger students to science and research through direct hands-on mentored experience in Monell's labs.

Upon Dr. Kare's death in 1990, Gary K. Beauchamp, Ph.D. was appointed as the Center's second Director, a position he holds today. Many eminent scientists, academicians and business executives have served the Center on the Board and as members of advisory committees. Dwight Risky, PhD, retired Senior Vice President, Consumer & Customer Insights at PepsiCo and current principal of Risky Business Solutions, LLC, was elected Chair of Monell's Board of Directors in October 2007. Dr. Risky continues a tradition of distinguished individuals who have served as Board Chairs: J. George Harrer (former president of the Ford Foundation), Lewis Thomas (emeritus chief executive officer of Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center and National Book Award recipient) and Martin Meyerson (emeritus president of the University of Pennsylvania).

Other institutions conduct outstanding basic and clinical research on taste and olfaction. However, no other institution or group of scientists has the history, depth and breadth of Monell's multidisciplinary approach, nor can they integrate research findings into an overall vision of the field. Current fundamental studies promise to provide new insights and avenues for major progress in understanding taste and smell, just as early pioneering studies at Monell provided the basis for what is known today.

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