

Heinz Awards honors six for solving critical human issues

April 23 2015, by Joe Mandak

A Massachusetts Institute of Technology researcher who has developed artificial human "microlivers" that can safely test the toxicity of drugs without endangering lives is one of six people chosen to receive Heinz Awards.

The awards recognize innovative work in the arts, environment, human condition, public policy and economics categories.

This year's winners, announced Thursday by the Pittsburgh-based Heinz Family Foundation, include MIT researcher Dr. Sangeeta Bhatia.

Using microchip technology, she's created so-called "microlivers" —each about the width of a human hair—that "can be exposed to a tiny amount of a drug to test its safety and efficacy without patient exposure," Bhatia told The Associated Press.

"This type of recognition helps also to bring science into the public eye so that everyone can appreciate the dedication and innovation that is happening in laboratories all over the country," Bhatia said.

New Yorker cartoonist Roz Chast, who last year published an illustrated memoir about caring for her elderly parents—"Can't We Talk about Something More Pleasant?"— is the arts category winner.

Each of the five awards includes \$250,000—with this year's human condition category award split by two co-winners, William McNulty and

Jacob Wood, of Team Rubicon in Los Angeles. The former Marines have organized veterans who respond to disaster emergencies, delivering humanitarian aid before conventional relief agencies can. The group also instills a sense of community for veterans, helping them to avoid feeling isolated following their military service.

"These remarkable men and women come from different fields and diverse backgrounds, but they share a bedrock conviction in their ability and responsibility as individuals to make a transformative impact on the world and the lives of others," said Teresa Heinz Kerry, chair of the Heinz Family Foundation.

"Their ingenuity and persistence demonstrate that America's can-do spirit is alive and well," Heinz Kerry said.

Frederica Perera, the founder and director of the Columbia (University) Center for Children's Environmental Health in New York City, is the winner in the environmental category.

Perera's work centers on prenatal and childhood exposure to hazardous chemicals, and how they may be linked to cancer, asthma and even neurobehavioral problems including Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder.

Oregon State University professor Aaron Wolf is the [public policy](#) prize winner.

He's worked to negotiate disputes over shared bodies of water ranging from the Columbia River, which flows in the United States and Canada, to international waters shared by countries in Southeast Asia and Africa. He's working with professors at 10 universities on five continents to develop a shared vision for global water governance.

The winners will be recognized at a ceremony in Pittsburgh on May 13.

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