END-OF-DECADE THANKS TO SPECIAL MEMBERS WHO PROVIDED EXTENSIVE SUPPORT AND CONTRIBUTIONS TO WHMA

The end of the decade/century/millennium is a special celebration even for relatively young organizations such as the WHMA. Namely, our society is completing its first decade of activities, after its incorporation in December, 1990 in Boston, MA. The first 100 members were actually enrolled, mostly based on personal invitations by letters and telephone, by the end of 1990. The following years resulted in an exponential growth of members, reaching almost 1000 by the end of 1994. Subsequently, the WHMA membership varied between 800-900. The variance in numbers was not due only to a slowdown in new enrollments, but mostly to the loss of members who moved and failed to notify us about new addresses – to use the epidemiologic jargon: lost for follow-up.

Nevertheless, we are proud that we have members who consistently supported the organization by work and/or financially. The list of members who contributed much more than the regular annual membership fee include: Drs. Andras Abraham, Endre Balazs, Ildiko Gerbatsch-Bornemissza, Laszlo Magdalene, Judith Makinen, Istvan Nyirjesy, Andrew Ostor, Joseph Sinkovics and Michael Vermes. We really appreciate their financial support, especially since we have a relatively small base of dues-paying members from the Americas and Western Europe. As you probably know, WHMA members from Hungary and neighboring countries pay their membership fees to WHMA chapters in Hungary, the Czech and Slovak Republics (loose WHMA organizations also exist in Romania and Yugoslavia, but they cannot collect membership fees yet).

You may now ask the legitimate question: how can then WHMA survive and function? With great difficulty but we do survive – without any taxpayer money or government support. We manage, mostly because of the multifaceted contributions of present and previous Executive Committee and key committee members and officers as well as because of the excess income from the international congresses and regional conferences organized by WHMA. In this connection, very special thanks are due to the local organizers of these events, e.g., Drs. Jozsef Sandor and Ferenc Szalay (First International Congress of WHMA), Drs. Karoly Cseh and Otto Dworak (Second International Congress), Dr. Lajos Nagy (Third International Congress), Drs. Miklos Palkovits and Zoltan Szabo (Fourth International Congress), Drs. Zoltan Gombos and Janos Filakovszky (First-Third Pannonian Conference), Dr. Attila Brassai (Fourth Pannonian Conference) and Dr. Janos Szebeni (Fifth US-Canadian Conference of WHMA).

We express our deepest appreciation to these and other WHMA members who helped our organization with their contribution, work and dedication.

KALMAN KOVACS, MD, PhD, DSc

In this issue of our newsletter we continue our series of prominent profiles of outstanding living Hungarian scientists and clinicians from around the world. This time we focus on Kalman Kovacs, MD, PhD, DSc presently at the Department of Pathology at the University of Toronto and St. Michael’s Hospital in Toronto, Ont., Canada.

Dr. Kovacs obtained his basic training at the University of Szeged Medical School where he early became interested in endocrinology and joined the Department of Internal Medicine of prominent and experimentally oriented endocrinologists such as Drs. Hetenyi and Julesz.
During his student years and later as a member of the First Department of Medicine in Szeged, he performed creative experiments in endocrinology which lead to an early degree of DSc. At that time Dr. Kovacs was the youngest Hungarian scientist-clinician to receive such a degree from the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. Subsequently, he was a research fellow in the Department of Pathology of H.L. Sheehan at the University of Liverpool, UK where he developed the first animal model of chemically induced pituitary necrosis. Actually, he had preliminary results with this model in Szeged, but he wanted to develop this model with the father of pituitary necrosis, i.e., in the department of "Sheehan of the syndrome fame."

Dr. Kovacs briefly returned to Szeged to continue his productive research and clinical work where he published with M. Julesz the first modern monograph of endocrinology in Hungarian. In the late 1960's, Dr. Kovacs joined the Institute of Experimental Medicine and Surgery at the University of Montreal lead by Hans Selye, the father of biologic stress. It was here that I first met Dr. Kovacs when I joined Selye's institute in 1969. As Dr. Kovacs turned out to be an excellent teacher, mentor and leader of research projects, we worked together on several studies related to the scope and mechanisms of action of catatoxic steroids and the effect of other hormones on drug toxicity and metabolism. To my regret, he left the institute after accepting an invitation to join the University of Toronto Department of Pathology in 1971. During his very productive stay in Hans Selye's institute, he was essentially the first to define the mechanism of action of catatoxic steroids, i.e., to recognize that these steroids, like phenobarbital, induce drug metabolizing enzymes in hepatic microsomes and thereby decrease the toxicity of various chemicals: Until then the mode of action of these steroids was not known and Dr. Kovacs was the first to demonstrate that catatoxic steroids, e.g., spironolactone induce proliferation of smooth endoplasmic reticulum in the rat liver.

His creative and productive research work continued at the University of Toronto using mostly human material. He and his devoted scientist wife, Dr. Eva Horvath, introduced the first modern classification of pituitary tumors based on electron microscopic and immunocytochemical criteria which revolutionized the diagnosis and treatment of hypophyseal tumors in the 1970s. Subsequently, he discovered new tumors such as the null cell adenomas, and described for the first time, after coining the name "misplaced exocytosis" (i.e., trapping of secretory granules between hypophyseal cells, instead of protrusion of these granules into the blood stream). He also played a seminal role in the identification and discovery of a growth hormone releasing factor by predicting the existence of such a molecule from a poorly differentiated tumor of the pancreas. He still has ongoing extensive collaborations with scientists from all over the world especially from the Mayo Clinic, Harvard University and the University of California. It is not surprising that Dr. Kovacs probably has the largest collection of pituitary tumors in the world.

We hope that both Dr. Kovacs and his wife will remain active and creative scientists for several years to come. (Sandor Szabo, MD, PhD, MPH)