Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine goes to Mello and Fire

On Monday, Oct. 2, at 4:40 a.m., the Karolinska Institutet in Stockholm, Sweden announced that Craig C. Mello, PhD, a Howard Hughes Medical Institute Investigator and the Blais University Chair in Molecular Medicine at the University of Massachusetts Medical School, and his colleague Andrew Z. Fire, PhD, of Stanford University School of Medicine, had been awarded the 2006 Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine for their discovery of RNAi.

From the Institutet’s early morning phone call to the new Nobel Laureate to two press conferences and an impromptu party held by his colleagues in the Program in Molecular Medicine, Dr. Mello’s constant companions that day were photographers, videographers and reporters. Below are some photo highlights.

1. Mello spent a few quiet minutes in his lab with his colleagues and students before the more visible events began. Pictured with him are Rita Sharma, a research associate in the Mello lab and her husband, Vishva Sharma, PhD, post-doc in the lab of Michelle Kelliher, PhD, associate professor of cancer biology.

2. Chancellor and Dean Aaron Lazare was among the first to congratulate Mello in his office on the morning of the Nobel announcement.

3. The morning news conference at UMass was packed with reporters and photographers from AP, Reuters, the Boston Globe and the Worcester Telegram & Gazette, among many others. In addition, reporters from around the state and the world used the teleconference feature to phone in their questions.

4. As Mello addressed reporters, he thanked the co-recipient of the Nobel Prize, Andrew Fire, PhD, for his contributions to the RNAi discovery. “He’s one of the best collaborators a scientist could have.”

5. The morning press conference also drew Mello’s colleagues, students and friends. Pictured top, left to right, are Hanne Varmark, PhD, a post-doc in the lab of William E. Theurkauf, PhD, professor of molecular medicine, and Jessica Vasale and Julie Claycomb, PhD, a GSBS student and a post-doc (respectively) in the Mello lab. Bottom, left to right, are Pedro Batista and Daniel Chaves, graduate students, and Rita Sharma, a research associate, all of the Mello lab.

6. Mello with his wife, Edit, and their youngest daughter, Victoria, after the Boston press conference, which was held in the new UMass Club at the President’s Office.

7. Mello spent some time after the press conference with Jack and Shelley Blais, UMass benefactors and long-time supporters of his research. Mr. Blais said, “Shelley and I are happy to be part of this new frontier in biomedical research that RNAi represents.” Also pictured are Chancellor and Dean Aaron Lazare and new UMass Board of Trustees chair Stephen Tocco (far right).
The announcement of Dr. Craig Mello’s receipt of the Nobel Prize on Monday, Oct. 2, brought news coverage from around the globe. On Tuesday, Oct. 3, the opportunity to congratulate Mello was brought to the UMass Medical School family of faculty, students and employees at a reception honoring him for his extraordinary achievement.

**Tuesday, October 3**

1. When Mello arrived at the reception in the Lazare Research Building, he was greeted by an enthusiastic and sustained ovation.

2. People from all areas of the UMMS community attended the celebration. The Blais Pavilion and the LRB lobby were filled to capacity.

3. Mello was greeted by fellow RNAi researcher Phillip D. Zamore, PhD, the Gretchen Stone Cook Chair in Biomedical Sciences and professor of biochemistry & molecular pharmacology.

4. Mello autographs a poster illustrating the RNAi mechanism. The poster was presented to the scientist by the Office of Technology Management’s Lisa Decker, PhD, who has worked closely with Mello on RNAi licensing programs.

5. In toasting Mello, Professor and Chair of Molecular Medicine Michael P. Czech, PhD, who recruited Mello to UMMS in 1994, said that the leap of faith all scientists and those who support them take in coming to a young institution such as UMMS is justified by the Nobel recognition. He added that it is sometimes easy to forget that science can change the world, but that Monday’s announcement “was a reminder that science can, does and did change the world.”

6. Mello said about winning the Nobel Prize: “This is not about an achievement or an ending. It is about a beginning. We have a unique chemistry here and an unparalleled expertise in RNAi. We have a unique opportunity. We have to seize that opportunity.”

7. In his toast, Mello acknowledged the members of his lab, saying that his colleagues had participated “every step of the way” in the research that led to the discovery of RNAi. Here, they surround him and applaud him once more.