

Incoming ethics chief set to move focus off stem cells

The US President's Council on Bioethics has a new leader — Edmund Pellegrino, an 85-year-old ethicist who is expected to target conflicts of interest in science and medical research.

Observers predict that Pellegrino will take the council in a very different direction from Leon Kass, its previous leader. Kass triggered controversy last year by dismissing a renowned biologist who did not share his views on stem-cell research (see *Nature* 428, 4; 2004). The council has so far played a visible and influential role in US public debate over such research.

Pellegrino, who takes over on 1 October, is an emeritus professor at Georgetown University Medical Center in Washington DC. He is known for his work on whether and why scientists or physicians do the right thing.

"Ed is as good as it gets in bioethics," says Glenn McGee, a bioethicist at Albany Medical College in New York. "He will invite the strongest and best thinkers to debate."

Enthusiast uses Google to reveal Roman ruins

Using satellite images from Google Maps and Google Earth, an Italian computer programmer has stumbled upon the remains of an ancient villa.

Luca Mori was studying maps of the region around his town of Sorbolo, near Parma, when he noticed a prominent, oval, shaded form more than 500 metres long. It was the meander of an ancient river, visible because former watercourses absorb different amounts of moisture from the air than their surroundings do.

His eye was caught by unusual 'rectangular shadows' nearby. Curious, he analysed the image further, and concluded that the lines must represent a buried structure of human origin. Eventually, he



Analysis of a Google map led to the discovery of a Roman villa like this one in Parma, Italy.

CULTURAL MINISTRY/EMILIA ROMAGNA

Basking robot takes the plunge

Solar-powered vehicles that work underwater may sound like a far-out idea, but US robotics experts have made them a reality. This 170-kilogram solar autonomous underwater vehicle, or SAUV, can dive down to 500 metres, says robotics expert Arthur Sanderson of Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in Troy, New York.

The vehicle surfaces to recharge its batteries using solar panels. These top-ups mean it runs for longer than other subs and can make more measurements of aquatic properties such as levels of dissolved oxygen. Sanderson and his



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colleagues envisage several of the vehicles diving in concert, giving three-dimensional glimpses of the underwater world.

traced out what looked like the inner courtyards of a villa.

Mori, who describes the finding on his blog, *Quelli Della Bassa*, contacted archaeologists, including experts at the National Archaeological Museum of Parma. They confirmed the find. At first it was thought to be a Bronze Age village, but an inspection of the site turned up ceramic pieces that indicated it was a Roman villa. The local authorities will have to approve any archaeological digs before they can take place.

► www.quellidellabassa.org

Bird lovers file suit to protect woodpecker

The recent rediscovery of the ivory-billed woodpecker (*Campephilus principalis*) in Arkansas has spawned a lawsuit.

The National Wildlife Federation and its Arkansas chapter want to halt a US\$320-million irrigation project, which they says may harm the bird's habitat. On 8 September, they filed a lawsuit against the US Army Corps of Engineers and the Department of the Interior to stop construction on the Grand Prairie Area Demonstration Project.

The environmentalists allege that the long-running project to divert water for rice farming will damage the woodpecker's habitat along the White and Cache rivers. Federal officials say the project would not harm the bird, reportedly found last year after a half-century hiatus (see *Nature* 437, 188–190; 2005).

University of California toasts first valley campus

A farming city in the sunny San Joaquin Valley is host to the University of California's first new campus in 40 years. The University of California, Merced, which

opened last week, has no departments and puts its graduate students in multi-disciplinary groups covering topics such as environmental systems and quantitative systems biology.

Merced is pitching itself as both interdisciplinary and diverse. A quarter of its first undergraduate class is Hispanic, and almost half will be the first in their families to go to college.

The small founding faculty includes Roland Winston, the solar-power pioneer from the University of Chicago; materials scientist Christopher Viney; and physical chemist Anne Myers Kelley, formerly of Kansas State University. Keith Alley, the vice-chancellor for research, estimates that the campus will draw about US\$8.5 million in external grants next year.

US agency airs policy for pesticide tests on humans

The US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) last week issued its policy governing studies that intentionally dose people with pesticides (see *Nature* 437, 24–25; 2005).

The proposed rules set scientific and ethical standards that studies must meet if the EPA is to consider them when it is determining safe exposure levels. The policy allows pesticide companies to use data from earlier studies — some dating from the 1960s — provided they met the ethical standards of their time. Past studies of pregnant women and children who happened to be exposed to pesticides will be allowed, but studies that intentionally dosed these groups will not.

In 1998, the EPA effectively banned pesticide manufacturers from using human toxicity studies to get their products to market. But it began reconsidering this on a case-by-case basis in 2003, after manufacturers successfully sued the agency.

The rules are open for public comment for 90 days, and must be finalized by February.