

Nation's First Chronic Lyme Disease Research Center at Columbia University

Oscar-nominated Actress Mary McDonnell Joins Leading Researchers and Patient Advocates to Announce Nation's First Chronic Lyme Disease Research Center at Columbia University

Lyme Disease Association and Greenwich Lyme Disease Task Force honored for underwriting center with \$675,000 gift

Lyme Disease cases on the rise

New York City (March 19, 2002) – On Thursday March 21, 2002, Columbia University will celebrate a \$675,000 gift that will make possible the establishment of the nation's first chronic Lyme disease research center, to be housed at Columbia. The gift – the first step towards the \$3 million dollars needed to start the center – was made by the Lyme Disease Association (LDA) and the Greenwich Lyme Disease Task Force, affiliate of the Lyme Disease Association (GLDTF). Oscar-nominated actress Mary McDonnell will join leading physicians, researchers, patient advocates, business and community leaders and elected officials at a luncheon ceremony to commemorate the center's establishment.

A luncheon to commemorate the announcement of the research center will take place on Thursday – March 21, 2002 at 12:30 p.m. in the Columbia Faculty Club at 630 West 168 Street on the fourth floor. The event is open to media.

“As we watch the number of Americans infected with Lyme disease continue to rise to record proportions, the Lyme Disease Association and the Greenwich Lyme Disease Task Force

believe the time is right for a Lyme-dedicated research center," said Pat Smith, President of the LDA. "Columbia University's leadership in the area of Lyme disease research and the high concentration of Lyme disease in the Northeast and mid-Atlantic region makes it the best home for this research center, although moneys will flow from the Center to Lyme disease projects throughout the country."

According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control (CDC), Lyme disease reporting increased 8 percent from 1999 to 2000. The number of cases reported in 2000 – 17,730 – was well above the yearly average of 12,745 cases that has been reported since 1991. The CDC also reports that Lyme disease infections are significantly underreported, making an actual estimate for the number of new Lyme infections difficult to determine.

"Columbia University is proud to be the home of the first Center in the U.S. committed to the study of chronic Lyme disease...through this Center, we will be able to expand our commitment to research the disease, its effects, and ways to treat and cope with it," said Dr. Brian Fallon, who will head the center and is currently Associate Professor of Clinical Psychiatry at Columbia University College of Physicians & Surgeons. "With the continued support of patient advocates like the LDA and the GLDTF, as well as those in the medical community who are treating Lyme disease around the country, we are certain that the scientific research from this Center will result in a better understanding and ultimately better treatment of Lyme Disease."

Oscar-nominated actress Mary McDonnell will be on hand to commemorate the center's establishment and to help raise awareness about Lyme disease in the United States. Also on hand will be Diane Blanchard and Deborah Siciliano, co presidents of the GLDTF, as well as Joan Kiplinger of Greenwich-based Tiffany & Co. and several invited elected officials.

The Lyme Disease Association, founded in 1990, is an all-volunteer national organization dedicated to Lyme disease prevention, research and education. The Greenwich Lyme Disease Task Force, which shares the same goals as the LDA, was established in 1998 and became an affiliate of the LDA in 2000.

For more information about Lyme disease, please visit the LDA Web site at www.lymediseaseassociation.org or the Columbia University Lyme Research Center Web site at www.columbia-lyme.org