



# DISCOVERY

THE DISCOVERY EYE FOUNDATION

The Discovery Eye Foundation supports cutting-edge research related to sight-threatening eye diseases and their treatments.

Thanksgiving 2019

## DEF Humanin Project Receives NIH Grant

**T**his past March, DEF Research Director Dr. Cristina Kenney received a coveted National Institutes of Health (NIH) grant for her research into the peptide humanin.

A peptide is a compound consisting of two or more amino acids linked in a chain. Humanin is a small peptide composed of 24 amino acids. It was discovered in Japan in 2001 by researchers who were studying Alzheimer's disease. They found that "normal" brains have humanin, while Alzheimer's brains have very little to none, concluding that humanin may be necessary for healthy brains.

**“This grant demonstrates the power of how initial project support can lead to bigger things.”**

It has since been shown that putting humanin into Alzheimer's cells makes them healthier. “We have found that when we are young, we have high levels of humanin. As we age, the levels decrease. This may be why cells don't function as well,” Kenney says.

Collaborating with Dr. Pinchas Cohen, dean of the USC Leonard Davis School of Gerontology, who is studying humanin for use in fighting Alzheimer's, Kenney is studying humanin for use in fighting eye diseases.

Kenney, who has been researching mitochondria in people with age-related macular degeneration (AMD), tested treating damaged

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## Financial Adviser Puts DEF at Top of Clients' Lists

Since 2017, Joe Schirripa has been advising clients at The Schirripa Group in Beverly Hills. And for nearly that long, he has understood the importance of Discovery Eye Foundation (DEF), both for himself and his clients.



As a financial adviser, Schirripa helps his clients plan for their liquidity and estate needs. One of his specialties is working with people of wealth to build family legacies. "Encouraging clients to consider philanthropy as part of their legacy is what we do," he says.

To that end, Schirripa looks for charities that fill four criteria:

1. They match the client's area of interest, usually causes that support environmental, social justice or health-care work.
2. They have accountability for the proper use of the money they receive.
3. They are sustainable, so clients can give year after year.
4. They are local to Southern California — even though their impact may be global — so leadership is accessible to donors.

When his clients are interested in health care, his very first recommendation is DEF, as the organization fulfills all the criteria. The relationship goes back to Schirripa's work with the father of DEF Medical Director Dr. Anthony Nesburn and the entire Nesburn family, whom he has been serving since the early 1980s.

"We've seen friends, family and clients affected by eye disease, including macular degeneration, and we understand the damage loss of eyesight can do," Schirripa says. "We should always press to cure things to let people have more fulfilling lives. Through DEF, we can cure blindness."

"People give to people," he adds. "We've been to presentations about mitochondria and DEF's important work, but when it comes right down to it, we care that there are good people doing good things. Our clients give to DEF annually and consistently, and we plan for that to continue for decades to come."

# Remembering DEF Founder Rita Pynoos

**R**ita Jean Pynoos, who founded Discovery Eye Foundation (DEF) with her husband of nearly 62 years, Morris, died Sept. 26. She was 97.

An accomplished weaver and designer of unique acrylic furniture, Pynoos served as a commissioner of the Smithsonian American Art Museum. She was an ardent and vocal supporter of the Equal Rights Amendment and a longtime member of Women in Philanthropy. She also was a member of the DEF board of directors until her death.

Just last year, Pynoos was remembering the first big Discovery Eye Foundation event. In 1970, the organization had just started as the Discovery Fund for Eye Research, with a mission to fund research into eye diseases. Their first event was held on the main floor of the Bullocks Wilshire department store in Los Angeles.

“I wanted people to *discover*,” she said. “The first thing they discovered was the exquisite building and Bullocks Wilshire,” which is what she told the head of the store to get him to donate the space. “I wanted all the money to go to Discovery, so I made sure all the expenses were donated. We made more than \$20,000 that night, which was a lot of money back then.”

It wasn’t Pynoos’ first philanthropic event. “Everybody in the family does service work,” she said. “It goes way back — my mother, my mother’s mother.”

Pynoos’ own life was filled with charity work. “I volunteered my whole life in one project or another,”



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she said. “During the war years, I was with the Red Cross as head of camp and hospitals. I did whatever the patients and soldiers needed.”

Rita Pynoos always went where she saw a need. It was when her son, Jon, was diagnosed with keratoconus (KC) during college that her attention turned to eye disease. She and Morris, who died in 2002, founded DEF to help fund the research being conducted on KC and other diseases by Dr. Anthony Nesburn’s laboratories at the Estelle Doheny Eye Foundation.

“My parents realized how little was known and shared, in terms of information about how to cope with keratoconus and how little money was being spent by the government to understand the cures and causes,” Dr. Jon Pynoos says. “They wanted to bring more attention to eye diseases in general.”

“Without Rita and Morris, there would be no DEF,” DEF Medical Director Nesburn says. “The organization they began nearly 50 years ago has grown into an internationally recognized supporter of outstanding research. It is because of Rita and Morris that many people still and will have sight. We will be forever grateful to them for every breakthrough, every gain, every step we take toward treating and eliminating eye disease.”

On the 47th anniversary of the organization, Pynoos said: “Discovery was one of my pet things, and I saw it grow. ... Research money is very hard to come by. But that’s how everything is discovered.”

# Humanin

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mitochondria with a more powerful version of the peptide, humanin-G. She found that the peptide improved the health of the damaged retinal cells.

“The power of this peptide is tremendous, but no one has figured out exactly how it works or how to deliver it,” Kenney says. “Currently, you can’t eat it, and you can’t inject it. One of our biggest aims is to figure out a realistic delivery system.”

Kenney and Cohen received the grant of \$250,000 per year for three years to investigate how humanin works, as well as delivery systems. They are looking at creating nanoparticles that contain the humanin and can be injected for slow release to treat diseases such as AMD and glaucoma, as well as Alzheimer’s and other aging diseases.

“This grant demonstrates the power of how initial project

support can lead to bigger things,” Kenney says. “When you have an idea in an unknown area such as mitochondria peptides, you can’t get NIH funding until you collect copious data and publish. But in order to do that, you need funding. DEF provided that funding, so we could collect enough data to reach the point where we were awarded an NIH grant. This never would have happened without DEF and our donors.”

## 6 Easy Ways to Help DEF

Discovery Eye Foundation’s groundbreaking research needs your help to move forward. Try these easy ways to support DEF and its sight-saving work:

1. Shop using **smile.amazon.com** instead of amazon.com.
2. Celebrate events or honor others with a **tribute donation** to DEF.
3. Enjoy the ease of **monthly donations** charged to a credit card.
4. Maximize your gift by using your employer’s **matching program**.
5. **Donate stocks and bonds or cars** in DEF’s name.
6. Join our **Vision Legacy** planned-giving society, and leave the gift of sight.

For more details, visit [www.discoveryeye.org/other-ways-you-can-help](http://www.discoveryeye.org/other-ways-you-can-help).



## DOUBLE YOUR GIFT TO DEF TODAY!

Does your employer offer matching-gift funds?

If so, you can double your gift to DEF!

**\$25 becomes \$50**  
**\$100 becomes \$200**  
**\$1,000 becomes \$2,000**

Ask your employer if they offer matching gifts. If so, you just need a matching-gifts form. It’s as easy as that, and you can double your meaningful gift to support cutting-edge research.