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SCIENCE

Opening of Biological Sciences Building celebrated at 15th Connell Symposium

by Michal Ruprecht
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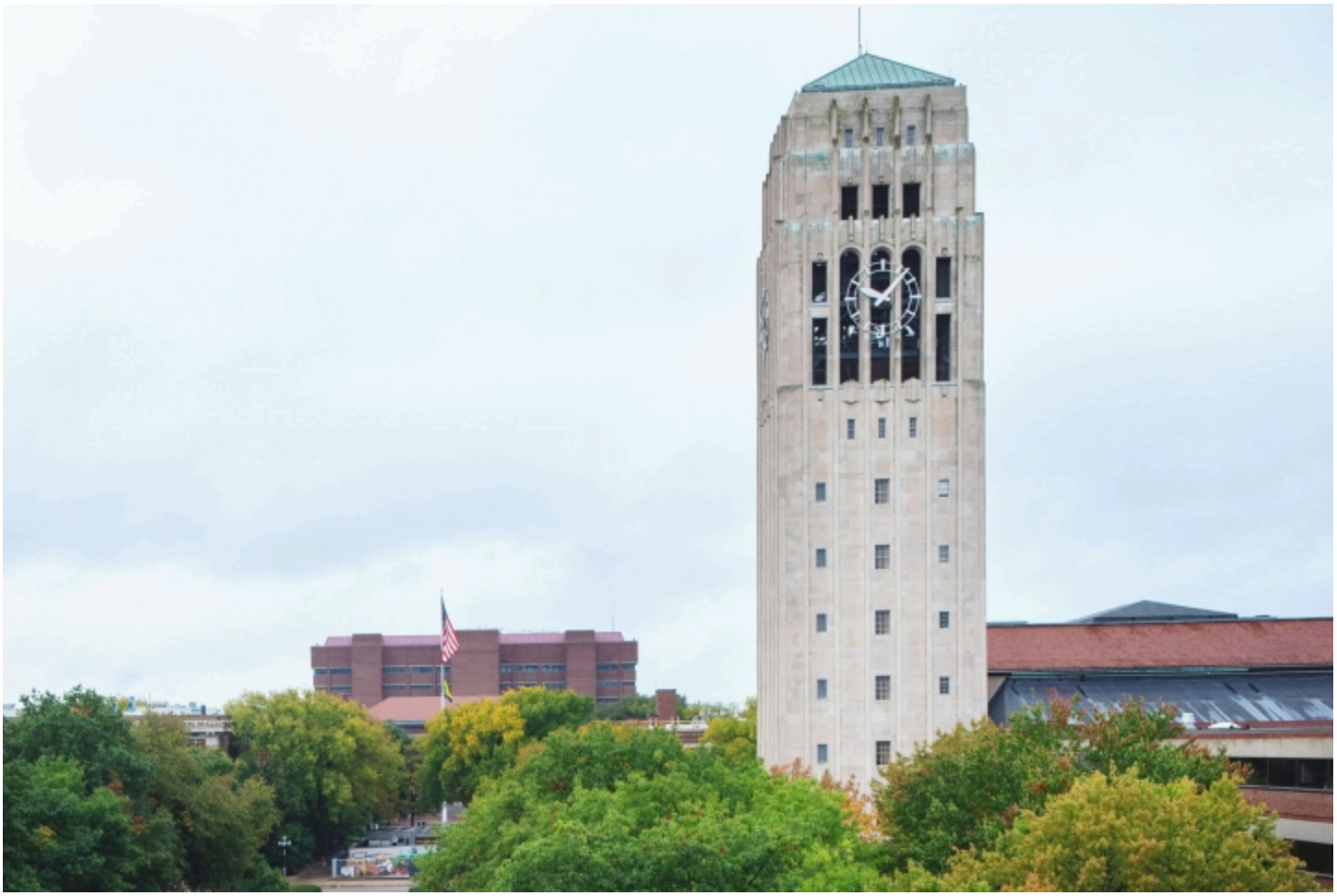

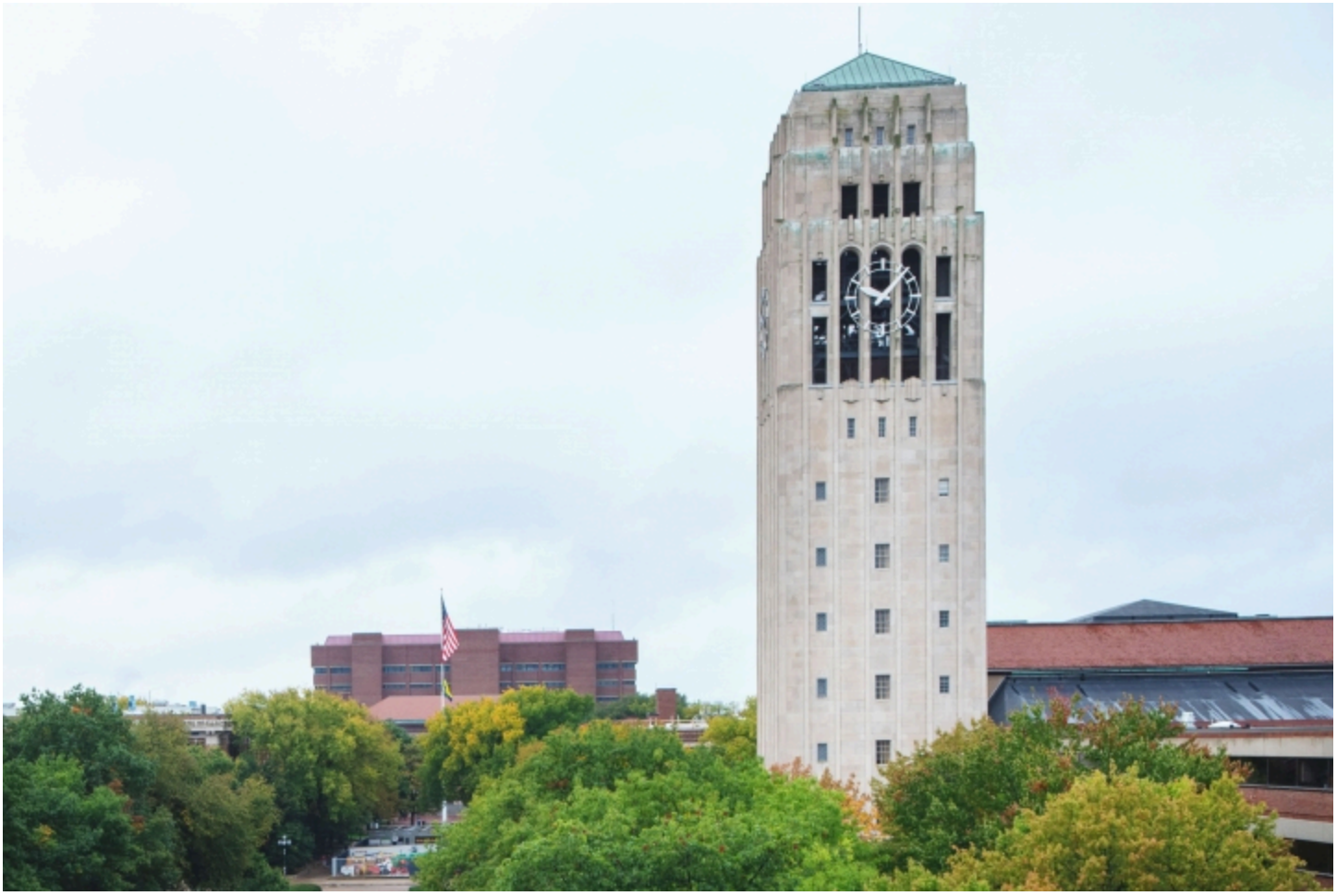

The University of Michigan's Department of Molecular, Cellular, and Developmental Biology hosted the 15th **Connell Symposium** about breakthroughs in biology on Monday. MCDB hosts the symposium each year with the exception of last year because of the construction of the new Biological Sciences Building.

MCDB Chair Robert Denver said this year's symposium was an opportunity to celebrate the opening of the BSB, located next to the Central Campus Transit Center and the Hill Neighborhood bridge. The new building is the new home of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology department, the Museum of Natural History, Palentology and Zoology.

"We just recently opened the Biological Sciences Building, and this was an opportunity for this department of MCDB to get together and really celebrate that by inviting in a number of very prominent scientists, Nobel Laureates and other prominent scientists," Denver said.

The day-long event featured speakers including a University alum, faculty member and three keynote speakers. The first keynote address was from Nobel Laureate and a University of California, Berkeley professor Randy Schekman about eukaryotic membrane traffic and how proteins enter and move between membrane-bound compartments of cells. Joanne Chory, a Salk Institute for Biological Studies professor and Jeannie Lee, a Harvard Medical School professor and molecular biologist at Massachusetts General Hospital,

were also keynote speakers. Chory spoke about how plants respond to dynamic changes in their light environment. She said she hopes to use her research to **combat** climate change. Lee spoke about her research in epigenetic regulation by long noncoding RNAs. The talks were followed by a poster session and dinner at the Biological Sciences Building.

Nobel Laureate and Stanford School of Medicine professor Thomas Südhof was scheduled to speak but was unable to attend the symposium.

Rackham student Shyama Nandakumar said this event was a great way for attendees to learn more about others' work in the University and across the field of biology.

"Even though we're a very diverse department, sometimes, you know, you come into work and you just interact with your own colleagues that are in your neighborhood who are doing similar things," Nandakumar said. "This kind of forces you to go to a different location and talk to people that you might see every day but might not interact with every day."

Nandakumar added that keynote speakers provide insight into the research being done at other institutions, which she said is important to get exposed to.

"When we bring in speakers from outside, it's great to hear from people who are doing stuff that might impact your work that you might have read in one paper," Nandakumar said. "These are all big names in their own respective fields, so it's kind of inspiring and getting to interact with them one-on-one over meals is also fantastic."

Lee agreed with Nandakumar, saying symposia like this build community, which is important in the early years of the new BSB. She added institutions in the U.S. need to get more students excited about academic science, and the new building will help in pursuing that goal.

"I think our country needs a steady pipeline of young investigators — you know, students at the high school, college and graduate levels — to get excited about academic science. That's something that our country does not do very well and, you know, we have to import talent," Lee said. "This is something that our country could do better at and, you know, again, symposia like this (and) this new building to mark the advancement of science to promote science are really important."

Denver said another important part of the BSB is the **inclusion** of the Museum of Natural History in the building, which he said will allow researchers to better interact with the public and communicate the research being conducted at the BSB. He added that future Connell Symposia will host only one keynote speaker.

“We were in the Kraus Natural Sciences Building before we moved here, which was over 100 years old, and so it really wasn’t outfitted for state-of-the-art life science research,” Denver said. “Moving to the BSB really upped our game in a lot of ways, and also it allowed us to develop a number of great outreach opportunities, because we not only have the research departments but also the Museum of Natural History so that’s going to let us, you know, interact more with the public and communicate to them our science and why we’re so excited about it.”