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## **Olson, noted UT Southwestern molecular biologist, wins 2012 Passano Award**

DALLAS – March 6, 2012 – Dr. Eric Olson, founding chairman of the molecular biology department at UT Southwestern Medical Center, has won the 2012 Passano Award for identifying major genetic pathways that control the development of the heart and other muscles.

In announcing the award, Passano Foundation officials noted that Dr. Olson’s discoveries at the interface of developmental biology and medicine “have profoundly influenced our understanding of the mechanisms responsible for development and dysfunction of the heart.”

His laboratory has used a sophisticated combination of biochemistry and genetics to expose networks of genes that control the formation of the heart and cardiovascular system. In so doing, Dr. Olson “unveiled the molecular underpinnings of congenital and acquired diseases of the heart and established a foundation for the advancement of new cardiovascular therapeutics,” said Dr. Joseph L. Goldstein, chairman of molecular genetics and co-winner of the 1985 Nobel Prize in physiology or medicine.

The \$50,000 award, established in 1943, will be presented at an April 30 dinner in Baltimore. The recognition honors U.S.-based research that leads to real-world applications in clinical medicine.

Dr. Daniel K. Podolsky, president of UT Southwestern, said: “Dr. Olson’s discoveries have provided profound insights into cardiac development and have advanced understanding of the basic mechanisms underlying altered cardiovascular function in disease.”

At UT Southwestern, Dr. Olson directs the Nancy B. and Jake L. Hamon Center for Basic Research in Cancer, the Nearburg Family Center for Basic and Clinical Research in Pediatric Oncology, and is associate director of the Donald W. Reynolds Cardiovascular Clinical Research Center. Several drugs based on Dr. Olson’s research are currently in development.

“This honor recognizes the work from my laboratory, which has been carried out by a dedicated team of colleagues here at UT Southwestern,” Dr. Olson said. “I am grateful to the Passano Foundation and I am also humbled to join the list of distinguished prior recipients of this award.”

Twenty-three Passano Award recipients have gone on to win the Nobel Prize, including three who have regental professorships at UT Southwestern: Dr. Goldstein; his co-winner, Dr. Michael S. Brown, director of the Erik Jonsson Center for Research in Molecular Genetics and Human Disease;

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and Dr. Alfred G. Gilman, regental professor emeritus of pharmacology who is chief scientific officer for the Cancer Prevention and Research Institute of Texas.

With Dr. Goldstein's encouragement, Dr. Olson joined the UT Southwestern faculty in 1995 to establish the molecular biology department. Dr. Olson, who earned his doctorate in biochemistry at Wake Forest University's Bowman Gray School of Medicine, was recruited from UT M.D. Anderson Cancer Center in Houston.

A member of the National Academy of Sciences and the Institute of Medicine, Dr. Olson has garnered many awards and honors, including the Institut de France's prestigious Lefoulon-Delalande Foundation Grand Prize, presented to him by the French Academy of Sciences in 2009. He also has won the Pollin Prize for Pediatric Research, the Pasarow Award in Cardiovascular Medicine, the Outstanding Investigator Award from the International Society for Heart Research, and an inaugural Distinguished Scientist Award from the American Heart Association. He was awarded the AHA's National Research Achievement Award for work that the organization described as having "redrawn battle lines in the fight against disease."

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