

Honoring the science of collaboration

Brandeis celebrates the grand opening of the Behavioral Genomics Center and the 10th anniversary of the Volen Center

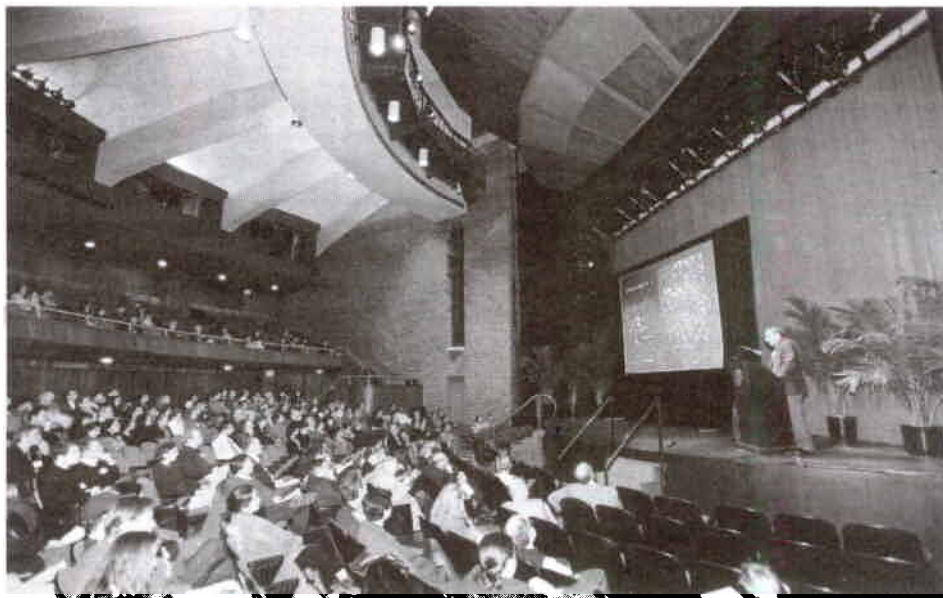
BY CRISTIN CARR

Brandeis faculty, students and friends gathered on March 22 to celebrate the grand opening of the National Center for Behavioral Genomics and the 10th anniversary of the Volen Center for Complex Systems. The events featured a symposium on autism and behavioral genomics.

"The Volen Center has always emphasized the importance of bringing together scientists from diverse disciplines in its goal of solving the complex mysteries of the brain and behavior," said Arthur Wingfield, the Nancy Lurie Marks Professor of Neuroscience and director of The Volen National Center for Complex Systems.

The new National Center for Behavioral Genomics will incorporate the Volen Center's unique collaborative approach in conducting research across traditional disciplinary boundaries but will focus more on the molecules and genes that affect behavior and brain function. Appropriately, it will share an anniversary date with the Volen Center, designated a "National Center" by the U.S. Congress because of the scope and importance of its work.

"The Symposium on Autism and Behavioral Genomics is a way to celebrate this philosophy—by bringing researchers from various fields together to discuss the molecular and genetic etiology as well as possible therapies for these



Edward Jones, Ph.D., director of the Center of Neuroscience at University of California, Davis, speaks at the morning session of the symposium.

developmental disorders at a molecular, genomic level," said Wingfield.

The new National Center for Behavioral Genomic's goal is to create a new understanding of how our genetic endowment helps create human behaviors. The Center will investigate questions about the nature and function of sleep, the mechanisms of learning and memory, and the genetic and molecular basis of cognition. Its focus will be on genetic disorders as well as mental disorders and diseases.

"Using modern methodology, the Center will take a new interdisciplinary approach to examining the impact of the genome on behavior," said Michael Rosbash, professor of biology,

Howard Hughes Medical Institute (HHMI) Investigator and director of the new National Center for Behavioral Genomics at Brandeis.

In addition, with support from the Nancy Lurie Marks Family Foundation, an innovative, upper-division undergraduate and graduate biology course on autism will be taught in the fall by Susan Birren, associate professor of neurobiology. The course will integrate the philosophy of the new center.

The celebration began with "Signaling and Coding in the Mammalian Taste System: Sweet, Bitter, and Umami," by keynote speaker Charles Zuker, Ph.D., professor at the University of California San Diego and HHMI Investigator.

Continued on page 4

Volen anniversary

Continued from page 3

Later that evening, as part of the festivities, Nancy Lurie Marks was honored for her passionate commitment to solving the mystery of autism. Founder of The Nancy Lurie Marks Family Foundation, she has partnered with the National Alliance for Autism Research to leverage its impact in the search for new treatments for the range of autism disorders. Based in Chestnut Hill, Mass., the foundation is one of the leading private funders in the United States of education and research directed at the understanding and treatment of autism.

The Nancy Lurie Marks Family Foundation has played a key role in the Volen National Center for Complex Systems since its beginning a decade ago, with the creation of the Nancy Lurie Marks Chair in Neuroscience and its continued support of education, research and visiting faculty at the Volen National Center for Complex Systems and the Center for Behavioral Genomics at Brandeis.

The Honorable Edward J. Markey, member of the U.S. House of Representatives, helped to recognize her remarkable contributions.