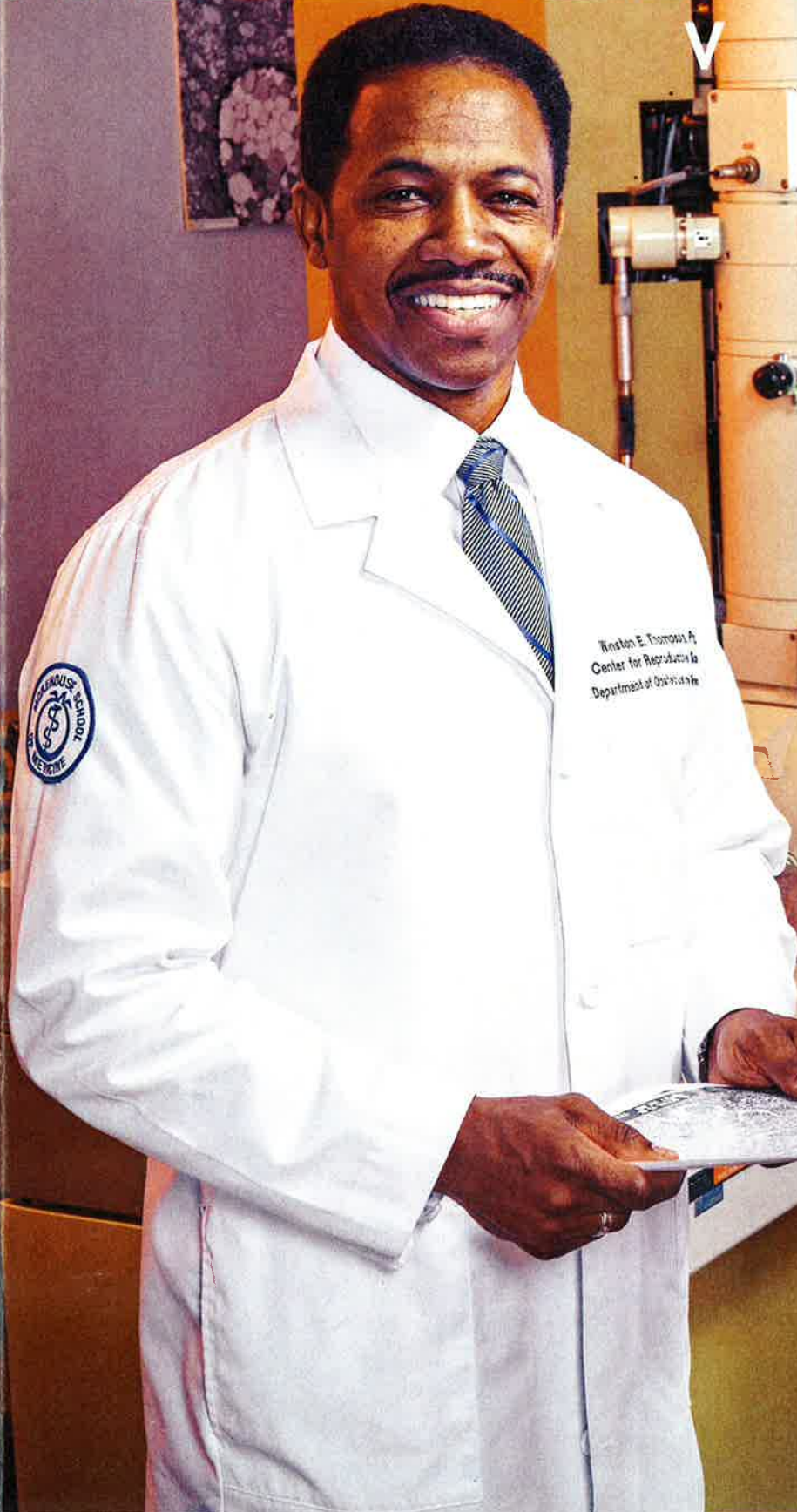


LAFAYETTE

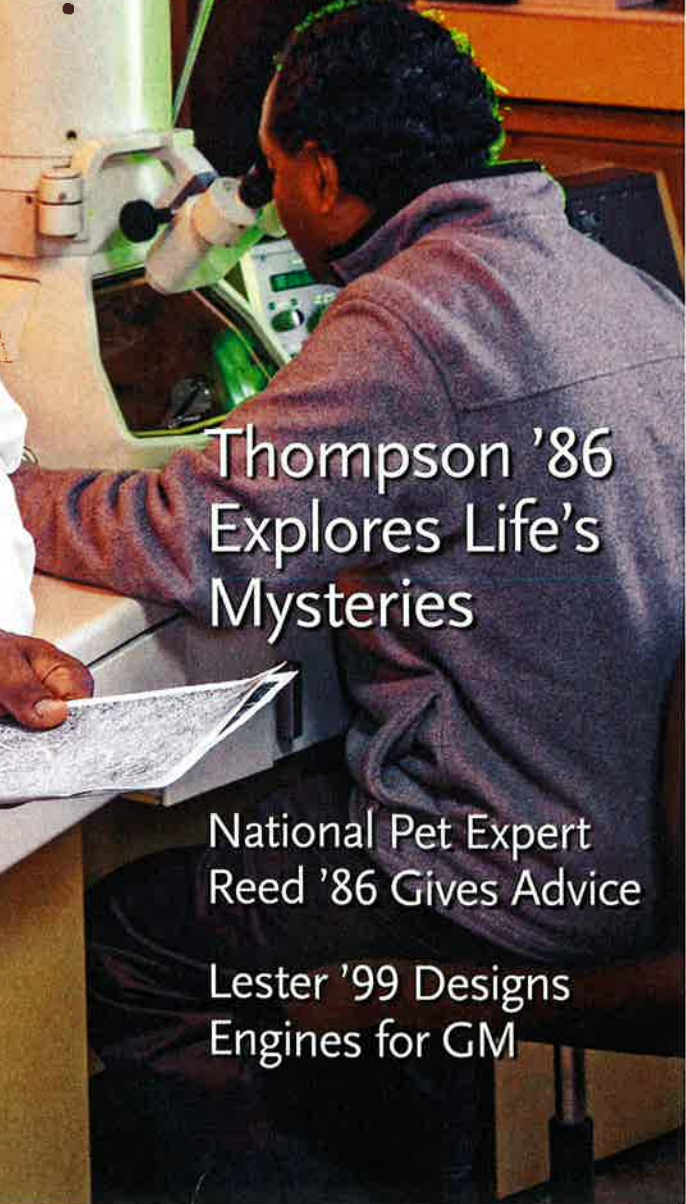
Winter 2015

# McDONOUGH

VOLUME



Winston E. Thompson, M.D.  
Center for Reproductive  
Medicine  
Department of Obstetrics and  
Gynecology



Thompson '86  
Explores Life's  
Mysteries

National Pet Expert  
Reed '86 Gives Advice

Lester '99 Designs  
Engines for GM



# McDONOUGH

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**On the cover:** Winston Thompson '86, chair of the physiology department, Morehouse School of Medicine, is well known for his research in women's reproductive health.

### Diversity and Inclusiveness Statement

Lafayette College is committed to creating a diverse community: one that is inclusive and responsive, and is supportive of each and all of its faculty, students, and staff. The College seeks to promote diversity in its many manifestations. These include but are not limited to race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, religion, disability, and place of origin. The College recognizes that we live in an increasingly interconnected, globalized world, and that students benefit from learning in educational and social contexts in which there are participants from all manner of backgrounds. The goal is to encourage students to consider diverse experiences and perspectives throughout their lives. All members of the College community share a responsibility for creating, maintaining, and developing a learning environment in which difference is valued, equity is sought, and inclusiveness is practiced. It is a mission of the College to advance diversity as defined above. The College will continue to assess its progress in a timely manner in order to ensure that its diversity initiatives are effective. **Adopted 2009**



Bard Wisley

# LIFE MYSTERIES EXPLORED

Winston Thompson '86 expands the understanding of female fertility and mentors future medical researchers.

By Matt Sinclair '90

**E**xamining how sea urchins balance salt in their systems and the mechanism that enables them to apply pressure on food they find in the sand was so fascinating to **Winston Thompson '86** that his dream of becoming a medical doctor changed to becoming a medical researcher.

"I learned I had more interest in science and discovery than just treating an illness," he says of his experience as a research assistant under the mentorship of **Chuck Holliday**, professor emeritus of biology.

In addition to the excitement of research, Thompson was also thrilled at being published as an undergraduate. "Publishing is important because it serves as an indicator that your peers recognize your contribution as meaningful in the research space. It says, 'I'm doing something that no one has done before.' That piqued my curiosity and led me to think more toward a science career."

Now a well-known and well-respected researcher in the field of women's reproductive health, Thompson continues that legacy. He created the Cooperative Reproductive Science Research Center in 1996 when he joined Morehouse School of Medicine, where he later became director of research for the Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology and director of the Mentoring Academy. Recently named chair of the physiology department, he fosters collaborations and mentors the next generation of health care providers and researchers who will change the trajectory of health equity.

In fact, beginning this summer, Lafayette students will have the chance to conduct research in his laboratory. Thompson is launching the program in partnership with **Robert Kurt**, professor and head of biology. "I'm happy

that Robert Kurt acted on the thought of reaching out to me as a way to give students an opportunity to see beyond Lafayette and to do research," says Thompson. "It also helps in diversifying the scientific community at Lafayette and the nation at large."

## Fertility Research

Thompson and his researchers are focused on understanding the mechanisms associated with ovarian health and how cells work together to ensure the development of a fertilizable egg. The group has demonstrated how proteins known as prohibitins help modulate specific responses to ovarian granulosa cells, which play an important physiological role in supporting the development and selection of the egg. With that knowledge, they are pursuing a targeted approach to destroying cancer cells in the ovaries without damaging normal cells.

Thompson supervises two junior faculty members, a postdoctorate researcher, and a research technician in his lab. In addition, four local undergraduate students participate via the Atlanta Center for Translational Research in Endometriosis program. ACTRE is a partnership between Morehouse and Emory University that focuses on women's health and reproductive research and introduces underrepresented minority students to translatio-



nal human reproductive research that demonstrates how cellular and molecular biology can become a bridge to clinical therapeutic treatments in reproductive medicine.

About 10 students from undergraduate institutions are involved each summer—four or five are assigned to Thompson's laboratory. The schools include Emory, Georgia State, Clark Atlanta University, Spellman College, Morehouse, Agnes Scott College, and now Lafayette.

"Winston is a great mentor, and he is passionate about recruitment and retention of underrepresented students in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics fields, which is one of the objectives of our Howard Hughes Medical Institute grant," says Kurt. "We have funds to support five Lafayette students to work with Lafayette alumni next summer. The opportunity to work with Winston and obtain an educational experience not available on our campus is particularly attractive to them."

Thompson draws on the entirety of his background to understand the issues women face when dealing with infertility. As department chair, he is in a better position than ever to advance the type of research that will make a difference in human lives. "One thing I'd like to develop here is a strong women's health program," he says. His plan is to take an interdisciplinary approach in addressing women's health issues.

In particular, he wants to develop a program that focuses on how those areas affect women of color—a field that remains under-researched. "We haven't had a functional program that focuses on the reproductive issues that disproportionately affect women of color," Thompson says. "For example, fibroids tend to occur more often in women of color."

### Building Expertise

A biology graduate, Thompson earned a master's in endocrinology from Rutgers and a joint doctorate from Rutgers in cell and developmental biology and University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey in biomedical sciences.

At Rutgers, Thompson worked on a collaborative research project that involved the ability of jellyfish to develop in microgravity and the effect it might have on their sense of up and down. The jellyfish were sent into space on board the Space Shuttle Columbia.

The desire to uncover rarely traveled avenues of research led him to his work in reproductive medicine. His work at Rutgers led to him being part of the centennial class of embryology fellows at Woods Hole Marine Biology Laboratory, where he earned a certificate in embryology.

"It was a boot camp for young scientists," Thompson says. "It's very intense, but you're free to think, without



Winston Thompson '86 is providing research opportunities for Lafayette students in summer 2015.

distraction, in the lab at any time. We used marine organisms to address biological questions."

His talent and tenacity led to his appointment as a postdoctoral fellow under the highly regarded Everett Anderson, Stillman Professor of Comparative Anatomy and professor of cell biology at Harvard Medical School. He received three years of postdoctoral training in in vivo and in vitro studies on the ontogeny, physiology, biochemistry, and molecular aspect of rodent ovarian biology that he later utilized to develop his embryological expertise in human reproduction.

These days, much of his tenacity is directed toward securing funding. Research grants have become increasingly competitive. "It is even more difficult at minority-serving institutions," he says of the ever-present challenge of raising funds for his laboratory. "As a scientist, you have to be adaptable. You cannot be stagnant. We have to find ways and means to get grants funded.... You can't work in silos. You have to work in a more collaborative fashion and build bridges. Where there are weaknesses in your program—through collaboration—you find strengths."

And as the relationship between Thompson's laboratory and Lafayette's biology department blossoms, who knows where the research will lead. "It's an opportunity for Lafayette to reach out and develop a program that bridges the gap between current students and alums," Thompson says. "It's another way to engage Lafayette's distinguished alumni community and to build programs that are assets to the local, national, and global communities. The possibilities are endless and exciting!" ♦

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