



JAPANESE AMERICAN CITIZENS LEAGUE / JACL

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JAPANESE AMERICAN OF THE BIENNIUM – SCIENCE DR. RICHARD MORIMOTO

Dr. Richard Morimoto is the Bill and Gayle Cook Professor in Biochemistry, Molecular Biology and Cell Biology and the Director of the Rice Institute for Biomedical Research at Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois. He is internationally renowned for his research on cells' heat shock response, which is activated to correct the misfolded proteins caused by environmental or physiological stress. Morimoto's lab has pioneered use of a roundworm, *Caenorhabditis elegans*, to study the heat shock response at the biochemical and genetic levels. As misfolded protein aggregates are the hallmark of diseases such as Alzheimer's, Parkinson's, Huntington's and Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS), Morimoto's work has exciting implications for developing treatment options for people suffering from neurodegenerative disorders.

Morimoto's research has gained recognition internationally. He has been a visiting professor at universities all over the world, including Technion Institute in Haifa, Israel, Kyoto University in Kyoto, Japan, Ecole Normale Supérieure in Paris, France and Peking University in Beijing, China. He has over 200 articles published in peer-reviewed science journals, including the Journal of Neuroscience and the New England Journal of Medicine, and currently serves as a scientific advisor and consultant for Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory Asia, the DKFZ-ZMBH Alliance at the University of Heidelberg, and BioCity Turku in Finland.

Morimoto joined the faculty at Northwestern University in 1982 when he served as the Assistant Professor of Biochemistry, Molecular & Cell Biology. In 1993, he was the chair of the Department of Biochemistry, Molecular & Cell Biology and in 1998-2004, he served as the Dean of the Graduate School. During a student campaign to establish an Asian American studies program at Northwestern, Morimoto played a key role in serving as a liaison between the students and the university.

Beyond his research, Morimoto has also demonstrated his commitment to youth and leadership development. The Summer Research Opportunities Program (SROP), established at Northwestern by Morimoto 17 years ago, selects 30 undergraduate students from across the country to engage in full-time research at a graduate level for the summer. Morimoto also founded Laboratory Adventures in Biological Sciences (LABS), which invites 60 local elementary and middle school students to use the state-of-the-art equipment at Northwestern's science labs to perform age-appropriate experiments. Each group of younger students is paired with a Northwestern biology or biomedical engineering student, as well as a top science student from Evanston Township High School, who help to design the curriculum and help the younger students conduct their experiments. Morimoto also welcomes undergraduate students to perform research at his lab, providing them with thorough training and support.

However, according to his nominators, "what makes Rick unique and exceptional is how he has transcended his work as a scientist to become an ambassador for what it means to be a Japanese American." Morimoto is an active member of the local Chicago Japanese American community. He is well known at Midwest Buddhist Temple, where he serves as the chairman of its Board of Directors and where he volunteers for Temple activities and fundraising events, including the "Ginza Festival" that has become an institution among Chicago's ethnic events.