Thank you to our staff, you are all wonderful! On October 20th, Michael Scheier presented Years of Service Awards to: (going from left to right)

Theresa Kurutz (25 years), Kathy Majors (25 years), Ellen Conser (10 years), Theresa Treasure (15 years), Shellie Sherman (10 years), Audrey Russo (15 years), and Paulette Williams (20 years).

Two other staff members received awards but were not in this photo: Beth Christiano Zimick (10 years), Junlei Li (10 years)
David Klahr surrenders at his Festschrift

Saturday's dinner during the Klahr festschrift was lovely for a variety of reasons, including the food, the company, the toasts to David Klahr, and the complimentary aftershave and cologne in the men's restroom. But the PLB wants to recognize the contribution of one of the department's work-study employees to the atmosphere. Guy Russo (pictured right) provided the evening's entertainment. On guitar and vocals¹, Guy provided a musical selection including the Beatles, Cat Stevens, the Beatles, Steely Dan, the Beatles, James Taylor, and the Beatles².

Footnotes
¹ Also on a relatively comfortable stool.
² Guy's selection of music may have been influenced by the demographic characteristics of the crowd. Although it should be noted that some of the attendees might be senior enough that they think about the Beatles the way that most of our current graduate students think about the Jonas Brothers.

Recycling the festschrift title format

The title of the Klahr festschrift, "From Child to Scientist" is both evocative and flexible. In fact, it's so flexible that I think we could use it for almost any future festschrift. Here are some examples. See if you can figure out which faculty member corresponds to which title.

From child to man-child
From child to terrified, terrified babies
From child to... some kind of tourist in Hawaii?
From child to gerbil whisperer
From tricycle to recumbent bike
From child to fanny-pack

You call that a child? THIS is a child (aka:
From child to Paul Hogan)
From child to Russia with Love
From child to Children’s School
From child to North Carolina to Duke to CMU to Yale

Faculty:
Marcel Just
David Plaut
Kevin Pelphrey
David Rakison
Lori Holt
Ken Kotovsky
Charles Kemp
Sharon Carver
Mike Scheier
Ken Kotovsky Seeks Patent on New Squirrel Launcher

Ken Kotovsky reportedly has tired of trapping and driving squirrels from his house to the South Side, and has spent the Fall developing the new Squirrel-APult. This innovative device launches unsuspecting squirrels straight across the river. Squirrels are lured into the Squirrel-APult basket by scraps of Kotovsky’s clothing, triggering a catapult mechanism. “This device may be my best invention yet,” Kotovsky said, “60% of squirrels survive the landings, which is pretty f**#in good. The ones that survive can go tell their s**tface cousins to stay off my property.” Kotovsky hopes to mass market the device once he can get a patent. This backyard slingshot is to be used for squirrel launching only. Kotovsky advises parents to keep their young children away from the Squirrel-APult. “Babies just don’t launch as well,” Kotovsky claims.

To see a demonstration of the Squirrel-APult, click here:  

336B Baker Hall Decoration Contest!

The PLB requests innovative ideas on how to decorate the new 336B conference room. Have you noticed the empty walls in there? How the sun hits the blank plaster in the afternoon? It’s time we spruce up 336B, and we need your input on what should go up. For example, your favorite picture of Ken attacking a squirrel, framed pictures of Thiessen being Thiessen, a mural of Rakison’s snakes and spiders, the sky is the limit. The PLB will print your best ideas in our next issue.

A framed picture of Thiessen can effectively increase fear-based learning
A note from the editors:

When you ask for grad submissions for the PLB, there is a strong chance that you’ll end up with some humorous depictions of the faculty. We hope you haven’t habitated to this kind of thing yet, because this month we feature another graduate student submission entitled ‘Faculty Pictionary’. See if you can guess who is who! One picture was removed because it only showed a non-distinct head and a pair of pants. Any guesses who that could be?
November Grad Talk

Answers (clockwise, from top left): Creswell, Feeney, Theissen, Cohen, Hayes, Just, Plaut, Scheier, Rakison
“It’s fiendishly brilliant. And also delicious.”
- Lori Holt

The Stroop Test, developed by John Ridley Test, is one of the most widely known tasks in psychology. It has provided insight into phenomena ranging from executive control to lexical development. However, the Stroop test has sometimes been criticized for its artificiality. Critics contend that the Stroop is difficult to use with participants (such as infants) who cannot be tested in traditional laboratory settings, and the results are not easily generalized to more naturalistic environments.

Seeking to make the Stroop Test more ecologically valid, and also more practical, Dr. Lori Holt has been working to develop a version of the Stroop test in the form of a cake. This new Cake-Stroop Test can be deployed in a wide variety of settings: birthdays, retirement parties, weddings, any occasion where a strip-per might emerge from pastry, and graduations.

“Our insight,” said Dr. Holt, “was that you can have a Stroop task any time there’s a conflict between potent responses. So we decided to make cakes, but in the form of something that is NOT a cake. It’s fiendishly brilliant. And also delicious.”

In the no-conflict trials of the Cake-Stroop test, the cake has a traditional cake shape. But in the conflict trials, the cake has the form of a common animal, such as a duck or goose. “The conflict trials lead to two strong, conflicting urges,” says Dr. Holt. “On the one hand, you have the potent response to eat the cake. But on the other hand, it’s shaped like a duck, and you would probably feel bad biting the head off of a duck.”

The Cake-Stroop allows researchers to measure the same dependent variables associated with a standard Stroop Test, reaction time and accuracy. So far, Dr. Holt has found that reaction time is slower in conflict trials, replicating the more traditional stroop test. Accuracy is...
also lower. Several participants, when attempting to
eat cake shaped like a duck, have missed their mouths
altogether and shoved cake into their nose or ears.

This is not to say that the task is perfect. The no-
conflict trials have been especially difficult. Presenting
participants with cake that looks like cake often results
in binge eating. “Some participants,” says Dr. Holt,
“don’t even wait for our instructions. They just devour
the cake immediately. We’re working to make
the cake less delicious, which we hope will solve
the problem.”

Other problems with the Cake-stroop test may
not have such straightforward solutions. Dr.
Holt’s research team has been stymied in their
efforts to create a fully crossed version of the
Cake-Stroop design. Participants presented
with ducks that look like ducks often end the
experiment early after experiencing angry flapp-
ing or beak-inflicted injuries. And attempts to
find ducks that look like cake have met with
little success. Despite these difficulties, Dr. Holt
is confident that her preliminary research will
lead to funding from the NIDCD, the National
Institute of Duck Cake Deliciousness.

- Erik Thiessen

“… you would
probably feel
bad biting the
head off a
duck”
- Dr. Lori Holt

What the duck should I do with this thing?!

Unable to control himself around cake, Erik provides several trials worth of useless data
Editorial Sidenote:
Lindsay claims that there are “good” surfing spots in New Jersey. The PLB will send members of the editorial staff to investigate… stay tuned.

Grad of the Month: Lindsay Victoria

PLB: You and Erika did a wonderful job on the Grad Talk issue in the PLB last month. Was it hard to morph the faces of all those faculty members? Which faculty member’s face proved to be the hardest to morph?

LV: Why, thank you! It all started over brunch at Pamela’s, where oh so many great ideas are born. The faculty yearbook idea was actually all Erika, so I can’t take too much credit. We started out just intending to create pictures for the usual PLB suspects: Rakison, Thiessen, Creswell, etc. However, before we knew it, countless hours had passed and we had made a picture for every single faculty member, plus extra pictures (Cutest Couples, the Chess Club, and whatnot). It wasn’t difficult at all, we just got a little too into it… No one was particularly hard to morph, but some faculty members did look wonderful in so many eras that is was difficult to choose… that’s how John Anderson ended up as a 90s rapper, Mike Scheier has dreadlocks, and David Klahr is rocking a mullet! We had tons of fun putting it together, so I’m glad that people enjoyed it!

PLB: Tell me, where are you from and what made you decide to come to CMU?

LV: I grew up in West Chester, Pennsylvania and moved to Mendham, New Jersey in high school. We’ve also had a beach house on Long Beach Island since I was little, so I have spent my summers being a beach bum there. I did my undergrad at the University of Richmond in Virginia. My undergraduate research was in a neuroscience lab, looking at memory abilities in rats. I wanted to move more into the cognitive realm for graduate school, and being at CMU certainly offered a good opportunity to do that. Sometimes I miss my rats, but working with human participants has proven to be much more interesting (and challenging)! I am interested in studying Alzheimer’s disease, so I really like having the chance to collaborate with researchers at UPMC. I’m also starting to really enjoy Pittsburgh…it’s a great city to live in as a grad student.

PLB: What types of things do you like to do in your free time?

LV: As a huge Yankee fan, much of my time of late has been consumed by watching baseball. (Note: at the time I am answering these questions, the Yankees are up in the World Series, 2-1. If the Yankees have won by the time this goes to press, please feel free to stop by my office at anytime to discuss the awesomeness that is Yankee baseball. If they have lost, please leave me alone.) I also do some volunteering at the Carnegie Museum of Art, and I like to knit and read for fun when I have the chance to enjoy something not scholarly or peer reviewed.

PLB: What are you currently working on in your research?

LV: Right now, I am learning to use EEG. I’m using a memory and priming task to look at different ERP components that might be potential early markers of Alzheimer’s pathology. Right now, there is quite a bit known about the neural components of Alzheimer’s and several really effective techniques for investigating those components in vivo. However, there are not many cognitive tasks that can effectively distinguish the subtle differences between different stages of dementia onset… that is what I’m working to develop in the big picture. I’m also wrapping up a study using midazolam to look at memory performance under pharmacologically-induced amnesia.

Heading out to shred some waves with my brother, Justin. No, we did not plan the coordinating outfits.