Scientists honored for COVID-19 tracker, prenatal test

September 28 2022, by MADDIE BURAKOFF

This photo provided by the Lasker Foundation in September 2022 shows Johns Hopkins University civil engineering professor Lauren Gardner in Baltimore. The 2022 Lasker public service award went to Gardner, an engineer who studies the spread of diseases. She worked with her lab team to develop the COVID-19 tracker as the coronavirus began spreading worldwide in January 2020. Credit: Will Kirk/Johns Hopkins University via AP

A Johns Hopkins University scientist who created a website to track COVID-19 cases worldwide is the recipient of this year's Lasker award for public service.

The $250,000 awards, announced Wednesday by the Albert and Mary Lasker Foundation, recognize achievements in medical research.
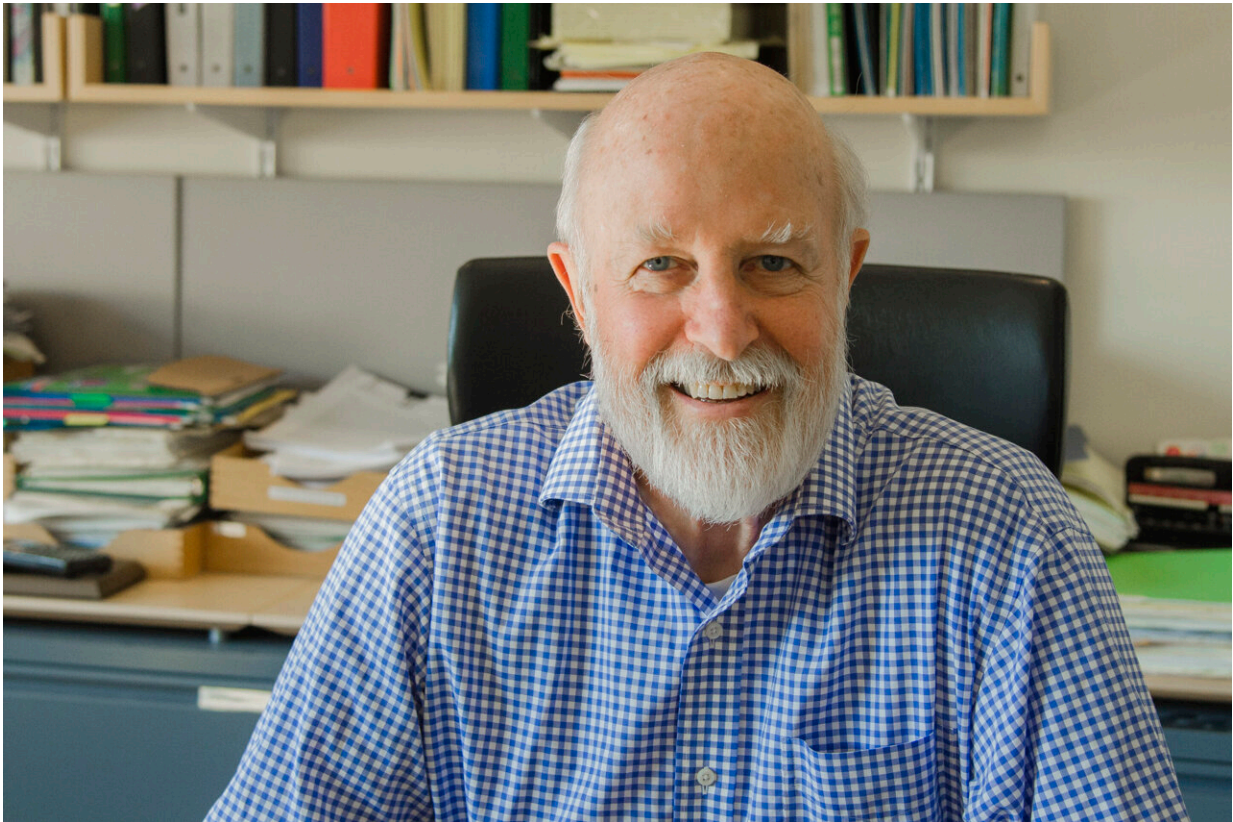
The public service award went to Lauren Gardner, an engineer who studies the spread of diseases. She worked with her lab team to develop the COVID-19 tracker as the coronavirus began spreading worldwide in January 2020. The dashboard became a key resource and now tracks global cases, deaths, vaccines and more. Through it all, the team has made the tracker freely available to the public.

The dashboard set "a new standard for public health data science" and helped inform both personal decisions and policy, the Lasker Foundation said in a release.

The prize for medical research was awarded to Yuk Ming Dennis Lo, a molecular biologist at the Chinese University of Hong Kong, for creating a prenatal blood test that can check for Down syndrome and other genetic conditions. Lo found that DNA from the fetus was in the mother's bloodstream, allowing genetic screening to be done with a blood test rather than a more invasive procedure.

This photo provided by the Lasker Foundation in September 2022 shows Johns Hopkins University civil engineering professor Lauren Gardner in Baltimore. The 2022 Lasker public service award went to Gardner, an engineer who studies the spread of diseases. She worked with her lab team to develop the COVID-19 tracker as the coronavirus began spreading worldwide in January 2020. Credit: Will Kirk/Johns Hopkins University via AP

This photo provided by the Lasker Foundation in September 2022 shows Richard Hynes in Cambridge, Mass. The 2022 Lasker basic research award was shared by three scientists: Hynes of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Erkki Ruoslahti of California's Sanford Burnham Prebys Medical Discovery Institute and Timothy A. Springer of Harvard Medical School. They were recognized for their research on key immune proteins called integrins, which help cells attach to other nearby cells and molecules. Credit: Kalman Zabarsky/Lasker Foundation via AP

This photo provided by the Lasker Foundation in September 2022 shows Erkki Ruoslahti in La Jolla, Calif. The 2022 Lasker basic research award was shared by three scientists: Ruoslahti of California's Sanford Burnham Prebys Medical Discovery Institute, Richard O. Hynes of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Timothy A. Springer of Harvard Medical School. They were recognized for their research on key immune proteins called integrins, which help cells attach to other nearby cells and molecules. Credit: Sanford Burnham Prebys via AP

This photo provided by the Lasker Foundation in September 2022 shows Yuk Ming Dennis Lo in Hong Kong. The 2022 Lasker prize for medical research was awarded to the molecular biologist at the Chinese University of Hong Kong, for creating a prenatal blood test that can check for Down syndrome and other genetic conditions. Lo found that DNA from the fetus was in the mother's bloodstream, allowing genetic screening to be done with a blood test rather than a more invasive procedure. Credit: Jason Pang Gallery/Hong Kong Science Park via AP

This photo provided by the Lasker Foundation in September 2022 shows Timothy A. Springer in Boston. The 2022 Lasker basic research award was shared by three scientists: Springer of Harvard Medical School, Richard O. Hynes of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Erkki Ruoslahti of California's Sanford Burnham Prebys Medical Discovery Institute. They were recognized for their research on key immune proteins called integrins, which

help cells attach to other nearby cells and molecules. Credit: Michael Goderre/Boston Childrens Hospital via AP

The basic research award was shared by three scientists: Richard O. Hynes of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Erkki Ruoslahti of California's Sanford Burnham Prebys Medical Discovery Institute and Timothy A. Springer of Harvard Medical School. They were recognized for their research on key immune proteins called integrins, which help cells attach to other nearby cells and molecules. Their work helped launch the field of integrin research, which has since led to new strategies for treating disease.