

Renowned scientist to speak here this fall Seattle's Dr. Leroy Hood developed technology used in human genome project

By Addy Hatch

One of the world's preeminent biotechnology scientists will be in Spokane this fall to talk about how this region's health-care industry and its colleges and universities can work together to build a biotech industry here.

The scientist, Dr. Leroy Hood, developed the technology that made possible the groundbreaking human genome project—an effort to map the sequence of human DNA—and has founded or co-founded a string of successful biotech companies, including industry powerhouse Amgen Inc., a \$5.5 billion-a-year Thousand Oaks, Calif., company.

Hood will be in Spokane to speak at the Spokane Regional Chamber of Commerce's annual meeting on Sept. 30. The meeting, at the Spokane Ag Trade Center, is open to the public, although reservations are required.

A Missoula, Mont., native, Hood has worked in Seattle since 1992, when he was recruited there from the California Institute of Technology to establish a department of molecular biotechnology at the University of Washington. The new department—and Hood's presence there—was made possible by a \$12 million gift from Microsoft co-founder Bill Gates, the University of Washington said then.

"Dr. Leroy Hood is a true visionary in the emerging science of biotechnology," Gates said at the time, adding that Hood's "interdisciplinary" approach appealed to him.

Hood took that approach a step further when he left the university in 2000 to found the Institute for Systems Biology, a Seattle nonprofit research organization that uses biology, medicine, technology, and computational science to focus on systems as a whole rather than on individual cells, genes, or proteins.

In the future, the institute hopes that its approach will help identify people who are predisposed to certain diseases and, by prescribing a course of action, help people delay or prevent the onset of those diseases, its Web site says.

The institute has captured almost \$130 million in research funding in its three years in existence, including nearly \$85 million in federal grants and \$20 million in private contributions.

Hood, 64, holds a dozen patents for his work, and has published more than 500 peer-reviewed papers. This year, he received a prestigious award for invention—the \$500,000 Lemelson-MIT prize—and last year received the Kyoto Prize in Advanced Technology.

He also has devoted his efforts to boosting interest in science and technology among young students. The Institute for Systems Biology is part of a consortium that has helped a handful of public school districts in the Puget Sound region adopt "inquiry-based" science curricula, using hands-on projects rather than rote learning and lectures to teach science.

Rich Hadley, president and CEO of the Spokane Regional chamber, says the group landed Hood as a speaker through "serendipity." Gretchen Sorensen, the Institute for Systems Biology's director of external affairs, previously served as regional director for the U.S. Small Business Administration, and in that post worked with the Spokane chamber to establish one of the country's first business information centers, he says.

During Hood's visit to Spokane, the chamber will introduce him to leaders in the health-care and biotechnology industries here, as well as to the heads of local universities and colleges, Hadley says.