



R. BONDE, U.S. GEOLOGICAL SURVEY

## GONE GENE GONE

In August, Pitt Med's Nathan Clark published research results in *Science* that change our understanding of the effects of certain neurotoxins in marine environments. Clark is a PhD associate professor of computational and systems biology specializing in evolutionary genomics. His team compared the genomes of aquatic mammals, like dolphins, manatees, and sea lions, with their terrestrial cousins. In doing so, the group discovered that the *PON1* (paraoxonase 1) gene—which defends humans and other land mammals against toxic organophosphates (a kind of pesticide commonly used in agriculture)—has been lost through the process of evolution. Without this gene, marine mammals have no way to combat the paralysis and brain damage associated with the pesticides.

No federal laws currently restrict these pesticides from contaminating agricultural runoff, and that may be a contributing factor to the unusually high mortality rates of certain marine mammals in the Southeastern United States. "The biggest implication is species conservation," says Clark. "A lot of aquatic animals live right below these agricultural fields where these pesticides are being used." It is Clark's hope that this discovery will prompt the Environmental Protection Agency to begin eliminating the use of organophosphates to protect vulnerable marine life. —Jon Kunitsky

## Appointments



Gittes

**GEORGE GITTES**, MD professor of pediatrics, has been appointed director of the Richard King Mellon Foundation Institute for Pediatric Research and co-scientific director at UPMC Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh. Among other initiatives, he will launch the Pittsburgh Study, which will follow thousands of area newborns as they grow up, tracking multiple health indicators. "There is already great strength here," says Gittes of Children's. "Strength that can be built on." Gittes is also the Benjamin R. Fisher Professor of Pediatric Surgery.

In September, **JUSTIN YEH** was named chief of the Division of Pediatric Cardiac Intensive Care Medicine and codirector of the Heart Institute at UPMC Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh. Yeh, an MD associate professor of pediatrics and critical care medicine at Pitt Med, says he's excited to

be mentoring young faculty in his new role. He'll be taking on "many great projects," including continuing his own study of mechanical support devices for heart patients. "There is an incredible opportunity to redefine care for patients with these types of devices," Yeh says.

In July, **AMAN MAHAJAN** was named chair of the Department of Anesthesiology and Perioperative Medicine at the University of Pittsburgh. Mahajan, an MD, PhD, and MBA, hails from UCLA, where he was chair of anesthesiology and perioperative medicine, among other roles. His research examines how neuromodulation can influence heart function. He holds Pitt's Peter and Eva Safar Chair. —EH



Yeh



Mahajan