Scherer Wins Steacie Prize

By Elaine Smith

PROFESSOR STEPHEN SCHERER OF molecular and medical genetics is the winner of the prestigious 2003 Steacie Prize, marking the fourth time in five years a U of T researcher has claimed the award.

A senior scientist in genetics and genomics biology at the Hospital for Sick Children and an associate chief of research, Scherer received the prize — presented annually to a young scientist or engineer for outstanding scientific research carried out in Canada — for his seminal contributions in the fields of human genomics and genetic disease research.

In accepting the award at a ceremony held at the hospital Feb. 26, Scherer said the accomplishment of which he is most proud is the establishment of the Centre for Applied Genomics and its work in translating the encyclopedia of the human genome into a language that both human geneticists and clinician scientists can use for their research studies.

"Our group is one of the few in the world that early on studied the human genome from its highest order structure of chromosomes through to its simplest form of linear DNA sequence," he said.

Scherer strongly supports collaborative research and his group has contributed to the mapping or discovery of some 20 disease-causing genes, many on human chromosome seven. "The most exciting times are ahead because genomics now provides an avenue for unifying natural scientists together in order to provide solutions to complex biomedical problems once considered unsolvable," he said.

Winners of the $15,000 prize, established in 1964 in memory of former National Research Council president E.W.R. Steacie, are selected by a distinguished panel, appointed annually by the E.W.R Steacie Memorial Fund.

"The panel responsible for judging this year's award was particularly impressed with the fact that Stephen Scherer is both a leader and key contributor to the large-scale genomics effort," said Robert McKellar, secretary of the Steacie Foundation. "It was evident that he is a true scientific innovator, trainer and mentor."