

DISTINGUISHED ALUMNUS OF THE YEAR

Elaine A. Ostrander, molecular biologist and clinical researcher at Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center in Seattle, is the recipient of the Yakima Valley Community College Alumni Association Distinguished Alumnus Award for 1997. The Award will be conferred during YVCC's 68th Commencement on June 12 at 7 p.m. in Parker Field. Her parents are Connie and Richard Ostrander of Yakima, and she graduated from YVCC in 1978.

Ostrander's genetic investigation includes the role of genes in cancer, especially breast and prostate cancer. A new project, the study of breast cancer in China, has her involved with a very large group of women from Shanghai to determine the frequency of inherited breast cancer in Asian women.

"Recently, my lab, together with colleagues at the Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center, discovered that about 10 percent of women who have breast cancer before the age of 35 have mutations in an important gene called the BRCA1 gene. Mutations in this gene lead to almost certain breast cancer, and women with these mutations have a 50 percent chance of passing them to their daughters," said Ostrander. This discovery was summarized as a 1996 lead article in the *New England Journal of Medicine*. It also forms the basis of public health policy regarding diagnostic testing for inherited breast cancer in young women in the United States.

"My lab is also interested in similar genes that predispose men to inherited prostate cancer. I believe my lab's most significant accomplishment has been in integrating the



disciplines of basic science, epidemiology, and clinical medicine to ask critical questions about the role of genetics in cancer.”

The degrees she has earned include a bachelor of science from the University of Washington, a Ph.D. in microbiology and immunology from the Oregon Health Sciences University, and a postdoctoral fellowship to Harvard University to conduct research for three years. She then advanced to the role of staff scientist and group leader of the Genetic Mapping Group at the Lawrence Berkeley National Lab. She is a 1976 graduate of Eisenhower High School.

Three years ago she joined the Fred Hutchinson Center where she holds joint faculty appointments in molecular medicine and clinical research. She is also an affiliate assistant professor for the University of Washington departments of zoology and molecular biotechnology.

Ostrander has published over 30 peer-reviewed articles, many in journals such as Science and Nature. She has lectured extensively to local community interest groups, high schools, universities, and other groups throughout the nation. Her work has also taken her abroad to Portugal, Japan and China.