

BayBio's East Bay connection

Friday, December 18, 2009, 2:17pm PST

BayBio's Pantheon awards ceremony Thursday night had a distinct East Bay flavor.

Along with lifetime achievement awards to UCSF Chancellor Susan Desmond-Hellmann, former chancellor Michael Bishop and venture capital Brook Byers, the event honored Biotech Partners, the Berkeley-based program that matches high school and college students with internships at East Bay life sciences companies, and Emeryville-based Amyris Biotechnologies and Tethys Inc.

Amyris' outstanding product award came for its No Compromise diesel fuel. Tethys, which is marketing a diabetes test that can predict onset of the disease as much as five years out, won the fast-start company award.

The other winners: Versant Ventures (financier of the year); Peninsula Congresswoman Anna Eshoo, biotech's best buddy in getting at least 12 years of patent exclusivity into the House version of the health care reform bill; and Gilead Sciences Inc. for its global reach in putting HIV treatments into the hands of people in developing countries.

News of the night: Former Monogram Biosciences CEO Bill Young is taking the chairman post at Biogen Idec, effective Jan. 1. (The news actually was announced last week, but ...)

Surprise appearance: Genentech founder Dr. Herb Boyer, handing out the awards to Desmond-Hellmann, Bishop and Byers.

The "protect your eyes from the light" moment: Conferring on stage after the ceremony, the life sciences triumverate of Bill Rutter, Herb Boyer and Michael Bishop.

Feel the love moment: "By honoring me, you honor everyone at UCSF." — Michael Bishop.

Confessional: Bishop on decline Herb Boyer's offer to be an early investor in Genentech. "I think it was \$500, but that was a long time ago." (He also turned down the chance to participate in Rutter's founding of Chiron.)

Funniest line of the night (from Desmond-Hellmann, who admitted to being nervous on stage but not necessarily because of her weighty fellow winners): "A lifetime achievement award? ... I'm hoping for a second lifetime."