

PHOTO COURTESY OF UUPER JAMES HALPERN



# Disaster training

## UUPER brings program to fruition

As part of his training with the American Red Cross Disaster Mental Health Services, New Paltz psychology professor James Halpern was asked to consider the possibility of a major airplane disaster in New York City. At the time, in the spring of 2001, the possibility seemed remote.

"None of us who was preparing for the worst could have even conceived of such a catastrophe," said Halpern, a UUP member.

After training, Halpern was sent to help victims of tropical storm Allison

in Louisiana. From there, he planned to take a year off from his Red Cross work. That plan changed on Sept. 11. Soon after the two planes struck the Twin Towers in Manhattan, Halpern led a team to Ground Zero. There, his

team assisted women looking for their children and helped to evacuate a nursing home. The next day, Halpern began supervising the missing-persons hotline operated by the city of New York.

# UUPERS IN THE NEWS

**LEFT:** The New Paltz Disaster Mental Health Institute, under the direction of UUPer James Halpern, will offer academic programs to support a new minor in disaster mental health and will sponsor workshops and conferences.

Recently, Halpern was on hand to support families of victims at the memorial service in New York. "There's still a lot that we're doing in connection to Sept. 11," Halpern said.

This fall, Halpern traveled to western Pennsylvania, which has been suffering from the effects of the recent hurricanes. His work as a disaster mental health counselor ranges from practical assistance, like finding blankets and medicines for victims, to resolving family conflicts.

Halpern has also brought his experiences as a disaster mental health counselor back onto campus. In the spring of 2003, with a grant from UUP, Halpern organized a conference at New Paltz entitled "Lessons from 9/11." He has offered courses in disaster mental health, which will soon become an interdisciplinary minor.

This fall, Halpern launched a new project as director of the Disaster Mental Health Institute. Halpern said that Gerald Benjamin, the dean of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, "really encouraged me to take the work that I was doing and integrate it into the programs we offer." The institute will offer academic programs to support the new minor and will sponsor workshops and conferences for members of the community.

"We want the institute to serve the region and the community. My view is that, somehow, the relationship between the community and the university should be a much closer and much more supportive one," Halpern said.

UUPer Phyllis Freeman, the chair of the advisory board for the Disaster Mental Health Institute and a longtime colleague in the psychology department, called Halpern a "major force" in the Red Cross, as well as an "outstanding teacher and researcher."

"In the last few years," she said, "frankly, he's been my hero."

—Alyssa Colton

**SCIENTISTS HONORED FOR 'EARLY-CAREER' BIOTECH RESEARCH**—Two SUNY researchers, **Jeffrey Errington**, an assistant professor of chemical and biological engineering at SUNY Buffalo, and **Thomas Begley**, an assistant professor of biomedical sciences at SUNY Albany, received \$200,000 grants for their leadership and scientific discovery in the field of biotechnology. Their award-winning research was presented recently during the second annual James D. Watson Investigator Awards ceremony.

"I congratulate professors Errington and Begley for receiving the James D. Watson Investigator Award and for the work they do at the state university," said Chancellor Robert King. "These two scientists, who are still early in their careers, are shining examples of SUNY's world-class faculty that is leading SUNY to the front ranks of public higher education in America."

"This grant represents exactly what we intended to do in attracting the best and the brightest researchers to New York state through our Generating Employment through New York State Science (Gen\*NY\*sis) program," said state Sen. Majority Leader Joseph Bruno. "The talent between these two young scientists will undoubtedly benefit research and technology development in life sciences for generations to come."

The SUNY honorees are among 10 early-career researchers statewide who shared \$2 million in awards through the James D. Watson Investigator Program. Each \$200,000 grant is awarded for a two-year period. A funding initiative of the New York State Office of Science, Technology and Academic Research (NYSTAR), the James D. Watson Investigator Program helps New York retain its top scientific talent through professional recognition and development.

Errington is exploring ways to preserve proteins and other biomaterials so they can be more widely used in the pharmaceutical, personal-care and cosmetics industries. Errington investigates the properties of complex fluids and biological systems from a microscopic perspective.

Begley, with the Gen\*NY\*sis Center for Excellence in Cancer Genomics, is focused on how cells respond to chemotherapy drugs used to treat cancer. He is analyzing the macromolecular repair and signaling networks that process the chemical and enzymatic aftermath of these agents.

In 2004, SUNY scientists and inventors generated more than \$858 million in research funding that supports 11,000 research projects and sustains 21,000 jobs in New York state.

The James D. Watson Investigator initiative is part of the \$225 million Gen\*NY\*sis program, which was created to maximize the potential of the world-class life sciences research being conducted at New York's public, not-for-profit and private academic research institutions. The program complements New York's comprehensive efforts to make the Empire State an international leader in high-tech and biotechnology-related research and economic development.

