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VIVE LA CHIMIE IN CALIFORNIA

UC Riverside forges unusual new partnership with French national science agency

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On the lush and green campus of the University of California, Riverside (UCR), lies what chemistry professor Christopher A. Reed refers to as an aphrodisiac. It's a spanking new, \$14 million chemistry building with state-of-the-art labs that's helped seduce several high-profile chemists, including Reed, to the historic agricultural town southeast of Los Angeles.

The university's recent substantial investments in its chemistry department also persuaded noted French chemist Guy Bertrand to emigrate from the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (CNRS)--France's enormous national research agency--to UC Riverside. Although eager for new experiences in California, Bertrand--an expert in main-group and phosphorus chemistry--didn't want to sever his ties with CNRS, where he'd most recently been director of the Laboratory of Fundamental & Applied Heteroatom Chemistry.

And so with the help of Bertrand and UC Riverside and CNRS faculty and officials, the two institutions have devised an unusual partnership: Chemists from CNRS will be able to make UC Riverside their permanent home while maintaining their CNRS affiliation. With Bertrand as its director, the UCR-CNRS Joint Research Chemistry Laboratory, as it is officially known, will be a mingling not just of minds, but of resources.

A number of major research projects are in the works--such as the development of stable carbenes and anionic isomers of cations--which will be headed by three CNRS scientists at UC Riverside.

"I feel that I'm a member of UC Riverside without any doubt, but I also feel like a member of CNRS," Bertrand said. "I've kept my roots."

Last month, officials from both the university and CNRS cemented the partnership at a signing ceremony in the courtyard of the university's new chemical sciences building. A French delegation of



PARTNERSHIP CNRS's Berger (left) and UC Riverside's Orbach cement the joint chemistry laboratory, as UC officials and French scientists look on.



VIPS Orbach (from left), Haddon, Reed (seated), Bertrand, and UC Riverside chemistry department Chairman Michael F. Rettig.

scientists, undaunted by long flight delays and little sleep, watched as CNRS Chief Executive Geneviève Berger and UC Riverside Chancellor Raymond L. Orbach shook hands. UC Riverside staff then unveiled a French-style street sign reading Place du CNRS, posted on the chemistry building wall.

The new partnership comes during a period of intense growth for UC Riverside. Five years ago, enrollment hovered around 9,000. Now that the children of the baby boomers are entering college, its enrollment is more like 14,000 and is predicted to expand to an astounding 22,000 by 2010.

THE CHEMISTRY DEPARTMENT has hired nine junior chemistry faculty since 1995, as well as three senior distinguished faculty: Reed, Bertrand, and fullerene and nanotube expert Robert C. Haddon. The department expects to hire additional high-profile chemistry faculty in the next year or two, and plans are in the works for an even bigger, \$50 million chemistry building, scheduled for completion in 2004.

The university stands to gain numerous additional benefits from the collaboration with CNRS, Orbach said, including research exchanges, increased visibility for the campus, and a broadening of the scope of research.

A close working relationship with French scientists may also influence research in less tangible ways, said Orbach, a solid-state physicist who himself has collaborated with CNRS scientists for years. For example, when he was in France, three-hour lunches were a unique forum for tossing out ideas thick and fast, unfettered by judgment. "Maybe 95% of those ideas are wrong," he said, "but the 5% of the ideas that are right are really exciting."