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MDA's Augie's Quest Expands Testing of Potential ALS Therapeutics With New \$2 Million Grant to ALS TDI

CAMBRIDGE, Mass. – *Tuesday, March 1, 2011* – The Muscular Dystrophy Association (MDA) announced today that it has extended its research partnership with the ALS Therapy Development Institute (ALS TDI) through its flagship ALS fundraising initiative, Augie's Quest. The one-year renewal calls for an additional \$2 million grant to ALS TDI via Augie's Quest, which is lead by Chief Inspiration Officer Augie Nieto, a well known fitness pioneer diagnosed in 2005 with amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS, Lou Gehrig's disease). Since receiving his diagnosis, Nieto has partnered with the MDA, the world's largest non-governmental funder of ALS research, to launch Augie's Quest which has raised more than \$22 million for MDA-sponsored ALS research since 2007.

"Raising money for ALS research has been one of the greatest challenges I've ever taken on. It is great not only in the difficulty of getting people to give to a disease that is often overlooked by the general public but also in the sense that taking on this difficult task has been incredibly rewarding for me and my family. We hope that Augie's Quest and the work that we make possible at ALS TDI inspires people living with ALS today and their families to join us in our quest to eradicate this horrible disease," said Augie Nieto, who in addition to his busy schedule as chief inspiration officer at Augie's Quest serves as the chairman of the board at ALS TDI. Augie and his wife, Lynne, also serve as national co-chairs of MDA's ALS Division.

During the past four years, MDA's Augie's Quest and ALS TDI have raised more than \$40 million to fund a uniquely comprehensive drug discovery and development program. The effort led to the first ever statistical characterization of survival and noise variable of a leading model of neurodegeneration, the SOD1 mouse. The outcome from that project has been used as the basis for two separate international standards of practice guidelines. In addition, the partnership has funded the acquisition of nearly a million dollars of capital equipment at the Institute, which has been used to complete major gene expression studies aimed at discovering new molecular pathways related to disease onset and progression. In addition to funding portions of those efforts at ALS TDI, the MDA grants have also directly supported the Institute's robust preclinical therapeutic screening program. The Institute is advancing one of these potential therapies, *ALS TDI 00846*, toward the clinic for evaluation in people living with the disease today.

"Our relationship with ALS TDI is producing tangible results for the worldwide ALS community. This fast-track effort is altering the way researchers advance potential treatments for ALS and has helped many labs evaluate candidate therapeutics quicker and more efficiently than before," said R. Rodney Howell, M.D., Chairman of the MDA Board of Directors.

This new grant from MDA's Augie's Quest will fund several projects at ALS TDI, including the screening of at least three potential therapeutics targeting novel pathways identified by the Institute. In addition, a portion of the funding received from MDA's Augie's Quest will fund the Institute's efforts to characterize TDP-43 mouse model, an emerging model of neurodegeneration that has been related to ALS and other neurodegenerative diseases. Portions of other technology development projects around gene therapy and RNAi are also funded under the terms of the renewed grant from MDA's Augie's Quest.

“It is humbling to have the MDA continue its support of ALS TDI at such an enormous level. It is a testament to the efficiency and innovativeness of the multi-disciplinary team working at the Institute today. This grant will provide crucial new resources that we desperately need to continue to hone in on subtle aspects of disease and to execute an even bigger and bolder efficacy screening program,” said Steve Perrin, Ph.D., CEO and chief scientific officer at ALS TDI.

About MDA

MDA (www.mda.org) is the world’s largest nonprofit provider of ALS services and funder of ALS research. Over the years, MDA has invested more than \$290 million specifically fighting ALS. MDA operates more than 200 clinics at hospitals across the country, 38 of which are ALS-specific research and care centers. The Association’s unparalleled health care services, research, advocacy and education programs provide help and hope to more than 1 million Americans affected by ALS and 42 other neuromuscular diseases.

About Augie’s Quest

Fitness pioneer Augie Nieto started *Augie’s Quest* (www.augiesquest.org) in conjunction with MDA’s ALS Division. Nieto is co-founder and former president of Life Fitness of Chicago, and chairman of Octane Fitness. He and his wife, Lynne, serve as co-chairpersons of MDA’s ALS Division. Nieto received a diagnosis of ALS in March 2005, and *Augie’s Quest* raises money primarily through a variety of special events, including “Fight Night” in Tustin, CA; *Augie’s Quest* Bash in San Diego, CA; “Tradition of Hope” in Los Angeles, CA; “Celebrity Golf Classic” in Phoenix, AZ; “Gift of Time: St. Patty’s Day Bash” in Denver, CO; “Field of Hope Gala” in New Jersey; “Secure A Cure Golf Classic” in Purchase, NY; “Big Canyon Golf” in Newport Beach, CA; The ClubCorp Charity Classic at golf clubs nationwide; plus “Clubs for A Cure” special visitation benefits for *Augie’s Quest* at La Fitness and Bally Total Fitness locations across the country, as well as at scores of other independent and regional health clubs.

About ALS Therapy Development Institute

The mission of the ALS Therapy Development Institute (ALS TDI) is to develop effective therapeutics that slow or stop amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS, Lou Gehrig’s disease), as soon as possible. Since its founding in 1999 as the world’s first “nonprofit biotech”, ALS TDI has developed an internationally recognized, industrial-scale platform that allows for the development and testing of dozens of potential therapeutics each year. The Cambridge, Massachusetts based research Institute collaborates with worldwide leaders from both academia and industry to accelerate ALS therapeutic development. For more information about the Institute’s current research pipeline and to take a virtual tour of its laboratory, please visit us online at www.als.net

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