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July 11, 2007

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Cornell graduate student John Diaz-Montano receives Michael Villani Award

by Joe Ogradnick

Geneva, NY: John Diaz-Montano, a Ph.D. student working with Professor Anthony Shelton at Cornell University's New York State Agricultural Experiment Station (NYSAES) in Geneva, NY, is this year's recipient of the Michael G. Villani Award. The award, which each year provides a stipend of \$1,500 to further the research of a graduate student in the Department of Entomology, was established through a bequest from Michael Villani, a highly regarded member of the Entomology faculty who died in 2001.

Villani's research was focused on the interrelationships between turfgrass insects and the soil environment. He developed a unique radiographic technique to study the behavior of soil insects, and his research established the NYSAES as the worldwide center of excellence for this type of research. "Mike had a deep affection and great concern for all the people in the department," said Charles Linn, a senior research associate. "It was his wish that the recipient of the award be selected by the permanent technical staff and academics, not to include faculty. He believed that mentoring between a faculty member and a student was important, but that it was also important to encourage a bond between members of the technical staff and the students."

"The more that one is around John Diaz-Montano, the more one understands how interesting his life has been and what a bright future he will have," Shelton said. After emigrating from Colombia, Diaz-Montano enrolled at Kansas State, where he earned a master of science degree in 2006 for his work on soybean germplasm resistance to aphids and the plant pest's probing and feeding behavior. His research won him the award for best student poster at the 2006 national meeting of the Entomological Society of America.

"I offered John several options when he arrived at Cornell last fall, and he decided to work on thrips on onions," Shelton said. "Onion thrips have become more problematic, not only because they have become resistant to some of the major insecticides, but also because they have recently been documented to transmit iris yellow spot virus to onions in New York." According to Shelton, Diaz-Montano will study host plant resistance to both the thrips and the virus by means of extensive fieldwork and detailed behavioral assays in the laboratory.

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Pictures are linked to hi-res scans



Charlie Linn (left) presents certificate for Villani Award to John Diaz-Montano (right).

Credit: J. Ogradnick – NYSAES, Cornell University

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