Medical school professor wins national award for educating the public

Dr. J. John Cohen joins a list of recipients that includes Carl Sagan

AURORA, Colo. (Jan. 31, 2011) – Dr. J. John Cohen, a University of Colorado School of Medicine professor who has taught students and thousands of other Coloradans, will be awarded a national honor that’s also gone to astronomer Carl Sagan.

Cohen will receive the 2010 Award for Public Understanding of Science & Technology, given by the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS). Sagan was given the honor in 1995.

The teacher known as JJ has spent a career demystifying science for students and the general public.

Since Cohen founded the Mini Med School in 1989, more than 17,000 people, from kids to grandparents, have attended the free series of talks on medical science.

He also started Denver’s Café Scientifique, a public forum for scientific discussions, and Café Pedagogique, an informal meeting for conversation and discussion of teaching and learning by the students, staff, faculty and friends of the Anschutz Medical Campus.

The AAAS award committee said Cohen “has dedicated his career to thinking of new ways to share the excitement and importance of science with the general public.”

Cohen, a professor of immunology and medicine, has been teaching at the medical school since 1972. An early bloomer, he had a chemistry lab in his parents’ basement when he was 6, and held his first hospital job as a clinical biochemistry technician at the age of 12. He earned BSc, MSc, PhD, and MD,CM degrees, and in 2010 an honorary DSc, at McGill University in Montreal, his home town.
“I love teaching and explaining complex ideas in clear terms,” Cohen says. “But it’s also important that members of the public, who fund education and scientific research, understand the importance of this work to their own lives.”

Along with Sagan, previous recipients of the AAAS award Cohen is to receive include NOAA Administrator Jane Lubchenco, and Neil DeGrasse Tyson. The award will be presented Feb. 19 at the AAAS annual meeting in Washington, DC.

Faculty at the University of Colorado School of Medicine work to advance science and improve care. These faculty members include physicians, educators and scientists at University of Colorado Hospital, The Children’s Hospital, Denver Health, National Jewish Health, the Denver Veterans Affairs Medical Center. The school is located on the Anschutz Medical Campus, one of four campuses in the University of Colorado system. To learn more about the medical school’s care, education, research and community engagement, please visit its web site. For additional news and information, please visit the UC Denver newsroom online.