



SELF-PORTRAIT BY LEONARD ROME

When Lenny Rome was a kid, his mother used to say he had “every hobby in the world.” He still does.

As a youngster, Rome’s myriad hobbies included stamp, coin and rock collecting, acting, scouting, tennis, golf, skiing, movie-making, music (he played the clarinet and bassoon), swimming, painting and, in his mother’s words, “dragging kids and stray dogs home for lunch.”

Today, Professor Leonard H. Rome’s hobby is work, which he approaches — one might say attacks — with all the enthusiasm, vigor, intensity and good will that he once reserved for more traditional hobbies.

He is a distinguished scientist, a high-level administrator and an active member of UCLA’s Jonsson Comprehensive Cancer Center, where, as director of the Center’s Molecular, Cellular and Developmental Biology Program Area, he facilitates valuable information exchanges among faculty.

Research and scholarly writing earn Rome international respect for leadership in the investigation of mysterious, important little hunks of protein called vaults. His administrative duties center on innovative approaches to his responsibilities as UCLA School of Medicine’s Senior Associate Dean for Research, a title that makes Lenny Rome a crucial link between other scientists and the administration at the Medical School.

The son of an artist/homemaker and a feed store owner, Rome, 53, grew up in Youngstown, Ohio. He was not always a scholar. “I took books home in high school so my mom would think I was studying,” he says. “I didn’t really start reading until I was in college.”

Rome earned his bachelor’s degree in chemistry and his doctorate in biological chemistry at the University of Michigan.

Today he’s a scientific detective. He investigates vaults, which are tiny containers found inside human cells. Think of them as miniscule moving vans.

“We believe that in some cases, after drugs enter cancer cells they are designed to kill, vaults envelop those drugs and carry them away from the nucleus where they would kill the cells,” Rome says. That fact would account for a

dangerous situation called multi-drug resistance, in which cancer cells reject drugs designed to destroy them.

Rome and his colleagues discovered vaults in 1985. Today they lead the field in vault research. Scientists in the U.S., Europe and Asia seek their advice and collaboration.

Now is an exciting time for Rome. “Within months,” he says, “we could have the technology to deplete vault content in cells. If vault depletion prevents multi-drug resistance — and I expect it may — we will have taken an important step forward for cancer patients.”

Four years ago, when he accepted the position as dean of research, Rome made sure the job was exclusively to facilitate research.

“As dean, I help find the medical school and our faculty large grants and gifts, and then help distribute the money,” Rome says. “I encourage faculty to share ideas and equipment

Dr. Leonard Rome

Scientific STAND OUT

Scientist and administrator builds his highly distinguished career on enthusiasm, brilliance, vigor, good will and ordered chaos.

and to be nice to one another in ways that help the broadest number of faculty, their post docs and their students.”

Rome’s efforts in the dean’s office and at the cancer center play important roles in making UCLA a university where scientists affiliate in loose, informal teams whose members communicate and cooperate to an unusual degree. This collegiality leads to successful research and attracts leading scientists to campus.

One of Rome’s goals is to help scientists break out of the ivory tower. “Interaction with industry is essential,” he says. “It’s our responsibility to transfer our discoveries to the public where they can help people. There’s a delicate balance between the integrities of the academic world and the commercial world. One of my missions is to maintain that balance while melding those two worlds.”

Recently, Rome played a key role for the medical school in winning UCLA a \$100 million grant from the state of California. Scientists from several academic disciplines at UCLA, in cooperation with researchers from UC Santa Barbara, will use the money, plus approximately \$250 million in matching funds from corporate sponsors, to engineer new technologies at the atomic level. “UCLA School of Medicine researchers will work to develop therapies that target specific defective genes that cause diseases, including cancer,” Rome says.

On weekends, Rome becomes a homebody, spending time with his writer wife, Melanie, and their sons, Jordan, 19, Michael, 16 and Zachary, 6.

“I’m family-centered,” Rome says. “I play a little golf on Sundays, but, mostly, I love to mess around the house.” Messing around the house includes everything from watching sports on TV through changing the pool chemicals to building a family room, a bedroom, a bathroom and a study with his own hands.

“Between school and home, I keep busy,” Rome says. “My life needs to be complex. I have trouble being focused on one thing. I need ordered chaos around me.” ★