This was the year of moving boxes for many of our research faculty, as they packed up their laboratories and established new homes in the Biomedical Science Research Building (BSRB).

This stunning new building, with a five-story atrium, is the new crown jewel of the U-M research community—and gives many Internal Medicine labs new room to grow while freeing up much-needed space in other buildings. But what’s truly unique about the BSRB is the way it brings researchers together from many fields like never before, and facilitates the kind of inter-disciplinary interaction that must drive science in the 21st century.

As one of the investigators with a lab in the BSRB, I can vouch for the success of our medical school’s plan to allocate lab and office space according to research themes rather than departmental lines. This has brought those of us with clinical appointments into closer contact with our colleagues in the basic science departments, and has started to breed the kind of “cross fertilization” that had been hoped for. This puts us on the right footing to meet the expectations of the National Institutes of Health as it maps out future funding opportunities along the same kinds of cross-disciplinary lines.

Our department’s continued success in winning NIH grants at a time when funding is extremely competitive is another high point of the past year. We have risen in the national ranks, becoming the 9th most-funded Internal Medicine department in the country, with 175 grants in the year 2005, totaling more than $88.2 million. That represents a third of the Medical School’s entire NIH funding, and helped boost the Medical School to 10th place and the University to 7th place.

But every one of our NIH research dollars is hard-won, and the battle to win them is getting fiercer. Already, the department has had to provide bridge funds to help several faculty continue their research while they compete for grants. More will be needed in 2007. Likewise, the department has contributed funds to the Graduate Program in Cellular and Molecular Biology to help fill out funding for the PhD training program for students who work in Internal Medicine laboratories.

As a result, the dollars we receive from donors have become ever more important. This year, several of our top researchers were named to endowed professorships, allowing them to draw salary and research support from the generosity of donors rather than from their NIH grants. The first Brehm Scholar, funded by part of the $44 million gift from William and Delores Brehm, arrived. New or continued gifts from the Edward & Helen Mardigian Foundation, the Tuktawa Foundation of Charles Andrews, and from Michael and Marcia Klein provided crucial support for cardiovascular outcomes studies, liver research and lupus research, respectively.

The drive to translate our research findings from the laboratory to the clinic continues, with several divisions recruiting new PhD faculty to accelerate laboratory progress and interface with clinicians. This drive is also marked by this year’s 33 invention disclosures from the department, out of the Medical School’s 116 disclosures and the University’s 288.

I end this year with a salute to my immediate predecessor in this role, James Shayman, MD. He rose to the title of Associate Vice President for Research this year, assisting the University’s new top research officer Stephen Forrest, PhD in meeting all the challenges of running one of the nation’s largest academic research enterprises. Kudos, Jim!