



Photo by Armenda Boyer

Shannon Newerth, a sophomore plant science major, discovered a new microorganism species while she was still in high school. Today, that species bears her name: *Foliophilomyces newerthii*.

Sophomore continues research on species she discovered in high school

By Cheyenne Rueff

Shannon Newerth isn't just another Purdue undergraduate research assistant. That's because the sophomore plant science major from Beech Grove, Indiana, hit a jackpot while she was still in high school.

The summer before her senior year, Newerth was researching phylloplane yeasts, tiny microorganisms that live on the surface of plant leaves.

One normal day in the lab turned extraordinary when Newerth's very excited lab coordinator arrived.

"He came in and was freaking out," she said. "For some

reason, I remember him saying something like, 'Keep your shoes on,' or something." She can laugh about it now, but she wasn't then.

"I started panicking," said Newerth. "I thought something went wrong, something got contaminated, or something didn't work."

But the news was far from bad. The lab coordinator was so excited because Newerth had discovered a new species of phylloplane yeast.

At just 17 years old, Newerth was honored for her discovery in the name of the new yeast species: *Foliophilomyces newerthii*. The yeast is bright pink when grown in a Petri dish.

"It was really cool to tell people that," Newerth said.

Newerth was thrilled to have contributed to a field she has loved for years.

"I think I really started loving science when I was in the fifth grade," she said.

Her earliest memories are working on daily science worksheets. Although she doesn't recall the topics, she loved learning more about biology.

At home, her parents nurtured her love of science. Newerth's mother even made her daughter a home lab in an extra room of their house.

"I had my own table, and my mom zip-tied crates together to make shelves," Newerth said. "I used it as my Barbie house, but I quickly grew out of that."

Over time, she outfitted her lab with a *National Geographic* lab kit, complete with microscope, vials, and a telescope. Her first lab coat came later that year.

"It was so big on me, but I wore it anyway," she said.

So it may not seem so surprising that just a few years later she would discover a new species. But Newerth's work with the yeast didn't end after her discovery. She shared her work by entering science fairs and presenting her findings to her school board. She said she was excited to promote awareness about phylloplane yeast and its potential to further scientific understanding.

"Not many people know about yeasts," Newerth said. "They don't understand the relationships they have with plants."

More than that, she is eager to learn what new discoveries could bring.

"There is a lot of potential," she said.



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Students on the Street

What was one thing you wish you had in your residence hall room?



Kristie Neighbors

Agricultural education, junior, Franklin, Indiana

"Slippers. The floors are so cold. Having to get out of bed at night is terrible."



Joey Stillwell

Agronomy: agronomic business and marketing, senior, Paoli, Indiana

"An oven or stove to cook stuff in. We don't even have one in our building."



Macie Wippel

Agricultural education, senior, Orient, Ohio

"My own personal bathroom . . . or Jacuzzi."



Brandon Rice

Agricultural education, senior, Franklin, Indiana

"I wish I had a porch that I could walk out on when it was warm outside so I could sit and enjoy the sun while doing homework."



Erin Morrison

Agribusiness: agribusiness management, senior, Belle Plaine, Minnesota

"I wish I would have brought more pictures and decorations to remind me of home."



Jared Baird

Agribusiness: agribusiness management, senior, Scottsburg, Indiana

"I would have liked to have had my favorite dog at Purdue with me."



Kelly Beeker

Agribusiness: agribusiness management, senior, Greenfield, Indiana

"More space. I got to know my roommate really well!"

Have a story idea? Let us know by contacting Kevin Leigh Smith at kevlsmith@purdue.edu or 765-494-9558