

## **MEDIA RELEASE**

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### **Wired for sounding out bionic ear innovations**

Thirty-two years ago, Professor Graeme Clark's revolutionary invention, the cochlear implant was 'switched on' in the first ever patient, lighting up a Melbourne man's world with sound.

Since then, the device has helped more than 200,000 people break through the isolation of profound deafness and thanks to research, improvements continue to be made to the technology and implantation techniques that widen its reach to new candidates.

Many of those improvements were incubated at the ARC Centre of Excellence for Electromaterials Science (ACES) during Prof. Clark's tenure as a Chief Investigator and Bionics Program Leader and progress continues to be made through our association with his protégé, Prof. Stephen O'Leary.

Professor O'Leary – one of Australia's leading cochlear implant surgeons and researchers – is the keynote speaker at a community symposium being held to highlight innovations in medical bionics.

Prof. O'Leary will describe how the cochlear story has unfolded, as well as the challenges that are still to be met so that bionic devices can take a new place in augmenting human senses.

"We have moved from a time when the bionic ear could only assist those who were profoundly deaf, to a situation where the best outcomes are derived from combining cochlear implants with natural hearing," Prof. O'Leary said.

This means that more people, including those who suffer hearing loss as part of the ageing process, may be eligible for a cochlear implant in the future.

Professor O'Leary's presentation is part of the annual Bill Wheeler Community Symposium held each year to celebrate innovation in bionics research at the University of Wollongong, and in particular its flagship science research centre and ACES lead node the Intelligent Polymer Research Institute.

Presentations will also be made by Illawarra local Mrs Jo Williams whose son Felix owes his hearing to the cochlear implant as well as the winner (announced on the night) of the Bill Wheeler Award.

The annual award of \$2,000 is donated by the community in memory of Illawarra local Bill Wheeler who was passionate about the University of Wollongong's bionic research program, and recognises an outstanding PhD candidate whose project will benefit the community in the future.

The event, which is open to the community, is a great way to find out about the cutting-edge bionics research happening right here in Wollongong. Join us between 5.30pm – 7pm 2 October 2014 in the AIIM Facility, Innovation Campus North Wollongong.

Register for your free ticket via [electromaterials.edu.au](http://electromaterials.edu.au) or phone 02 4221 3788.

**Media contact: Sarah McMaster on 02 4221 3788 or [sarahmcm@uow.edu.au](mailto:sarahmcm@uow.edu.au)**