

The Deepwater Horizon Story

cover story

nowhere else. Although the agencies may have different missions, the scientists working together can have the same mission - trying to understand how the environment influences the health of the organisms that live in that environment, he said. "I've spent years doing environmental health. I've never been at a place where more than one or two people were interested in what I was doing, intellectually. Here, there are 20 or 30 people interested, so the difference is astronomical."

King agrees. He recalls bringing all the principle investigators together in spring 2013. The first agenda item had everyone introducing themselves and their work. "I swear we couldn't make it around the table because people were already starting to ask questions and form partnerships. What was supposed to be an hour-long conversation became a 2.5-hour conversation filled with brainstorming on possible projects."

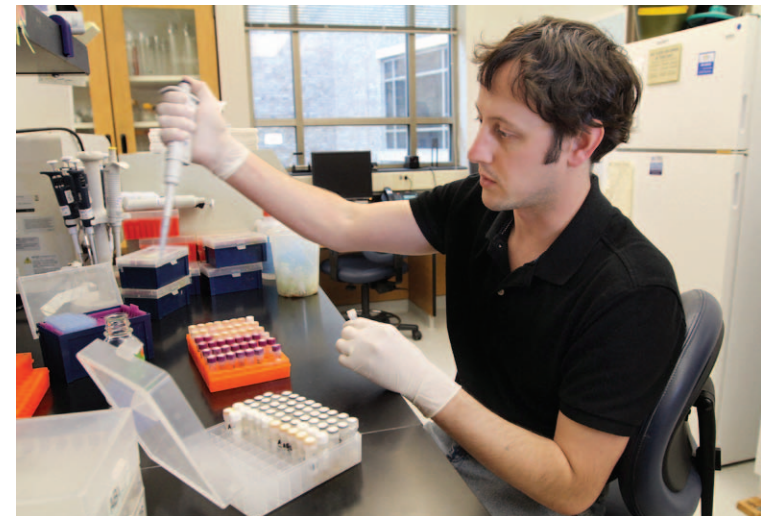
The difference goes beyond the collection of intellectual capital, though.

King said HML has an unusual pool of partners. Take NIST for example, which sets the gold standard in measurement, bringing to the table vast analytical capabilities. With a focus on the development of tools and very precise measurement that can be offered to other academic institutions, the federal government and other stakeholders, NIST sets important benchmarks with its rigorous standards. "Because of NIST's capabilities, you know that the technology, new methods, or resulting data have been tested and verified on many different levels. It gives the HML partners that one extra step of validation as our products and results go forward towards application," he said.

Add to that base the extra dimension of having a medical university in the research mix, and it creates a synergy hard to find anywhere else. "There's no other entity such as HML that's partnered with a medical university," King said. "That's the whole idea behind it. Back in the late

nineties, the partner institutions were present at the Fort Johnson Campus, but they existed in their own individual buildings until former U.S. Senator Fritz Hollings, local stakeholders, the partners and the community recognized how valuable it would be to bring all these entities together under one roof," he said.

"You can have a fisheries biologist working side by side with M.D.'s or Ph.D.'s who are investigating issues concerning human health. With these scientists working together, we can answer complex questions originating in estuaries and ocean-based environments, and link them to issues concerning human health and communities."



Matt Walker, a Wildlife Biologist with SCDNR, is genotyping Red Drum.