

Professors Frank Park and Andrew Wilber Win the Prestigious 2025 Orphan Dream Award

TAMPA, FL, UNITED STATES, February 25, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Biomedical researchers Frank Park, Ph.D., an Associate Professor at the University of Tennessee Health Science Center (UTHSC), and Andrew Wilber, Ph.D., an Associate Professor at Southern Illinois University School of Medicine, have been awarded the ninth annual Orphan Dream Award for their groundbreaking work advancing MiNiRoLu, a next-generation gene therapy designed to treat Sickle Cell Disease and Thalassemia.



Left to right, Dr. Frank Park, Patrick Girondi, Dr. Andrew Wilber

The annual honor recognizes individuals who have made extraordinary contributions in the field of rare diseases – “Orphan Diseases.”

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Patrick Girondi, SRT Founder

“Drs. Park and Wilber have dedicated their careers to creating therapies that are not only effective but also accessible to patients who need them most,” said Patrick Girondi, founder of San Rocco Therapeutics (SRT). Girondi added, “Their contributions have significantly enhanced the efficacy, safety, and cost-effectiveness of our gene therapy platform.”

The [story behind the Orphan Dream](#) statue originated with a family who lost 2 children to a rare disease, a Versace jacket gifted to a singer and a snow storm in southern Italy. The awards are individually [solid cast metal sculptures](#) created by artist Megan Euker.

In a surprise tribute, our 2025 Orphan Dream Award recipients were honored in the closing credits of the [film Resurrection](#).

Starring Joe Mantegna, Brian Connors, Ronnie Marmo and Patrick Girondi, Resurrection brings to life Girondi’s real-world crusade to find therapies for orphan diseases. The film dives deep into

the ethical challenges of medical research and the power of patient-driven innovation--the very mission Drs. Park and Wilber have championed through their extraordinary scientific contributions. A compelling follow-up to the Netflix smash hit *A Matter of Time*, this film continues the vital conversation surrounding the race for rare disease cures.

These two innovative and courageous researchers will stun the world with this new therapeutic, and Dr. Frank Park said, "It's not only that the cost is lower, but it's also more efficient," Dr. Park said of MiNiRoLu." in a January 9, 2026 article published by the University of Tennessee Health Science Center.

Select past recipients of the Orphan Dream Award include:

Dr. Franco Locatelli (2017), head of Italy's Health Department;

Dr. Michel Sadelain (2018), recipient of the 2024 Breakthrough Prize in Life Sciences;

Dr. John Tisdale (2019) of the National Institutes of Health, who was featured on 60 Minutes for his work towards curing Sickle Cell Disease;

Dr. Lucio Luzzatto (2021), former Chairman of the Ethics Committee of the American Society for Gene Therapy and former Chairman of Human Genetics and Hematology at Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center; and

Robert F. Kennedy Jr. (2024), Secretary of Health and Human Services.

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