



HUGO PARR

beneficial to Europe,” and he says that ESA will “continue work on the agency’s internal transformation program—a massive streamlining that is already under way, and whose purpose is to make the agency as cost efficient as possible.”

Parr received his bachelor’s and master’s degrees in physics from the University of Washington in the late 1960s and his PhD in low-temperature physics from the University of Oslo in 1976. He has been very involved in science policy both in Norway and on the international scene for nearly 20 years.

TONI FEDER

Physics Olympiad Held in Oslo

In the first week of July, top high school students from around the world gathered in Oslo, Norway, to compete in the 27th International Physics Olympiad. A total of 260 students from 55 countries competed in the event. They competed as individuals, but when the scores were tallied by country, China came in first (for the third year running), followed by Romania, the US, Iran, Vietnam, Taiwan, Russia and Germany. All five contestants from each of these countries won medals.

Among the 20 gold medalists was one girl, Rui Zhang of China, who had the second highest score overall. (Fewer than 4% of the contestants were female.) Another gold medalist, 13-year-old Christopher Hirata of Deerfield, Illinois, garnered a special award for “youngest participant.” The US team had 20 members; in addition to Hirata, those who competed in Oslo were gold medalists Joon Pakh of Alexandria, Virginia, and Ari Turner of Los Alamos, New Mexico, and bronze

medalists Andrew Houck of Englishtown, New Jersey, and Paul Lujan of San Francisco, California.

The students spent a day each tackling a set of tough theoretical and experimental problems. One of the three theory problems involved calculating ocean tidal magnitudes in an isolated Earth–Moon system with Earth modeled as a water-covered sphere. The experimental exam included determining the magnetic dipole moment of a disk using a physical pendulum with an embedded magnet.

When they were not working on the exams, the students toured Oslo and got to know their international peers. Dwight Neuenschwander, academic director of the US team, describes as particularly moving the impromptu chorus of the teams from China, Taiwan and Singapore, who stood up at the closing banquet and sang a song about working together.

Ironically, some of the same elements among the participating countries—such as culture, government and national wealth—that help make the event such a rewarding experience are also creating difficulties for the olympiad organizers, as they struggle to cover the growing costs associated with the rapidly growing event. (Only five countries participated in the first International Physics Olympiad, held in Poland in 1967. See *PHYSICS TODAY*, September 1993, page 40.)

This year, putting on the olympiad cost about \$633 000, including preparation for the competition (such as set-ups for lab problems and the awards) and food, lodging and excursions for the visiting teams. To cut costs, the olympiad organizers did not pay for health insurance, cut out the usual pocket money for participants—which was originally provided because some countries did not allow money to be taken abroad—and shortened the event by one day to six days total, which, says Arnt Inge Vistnes, chair of the Norwegian organizing committee, “put stress on examiners, but cut accommodation and meal costs by about 14%.” As usual, training, selection and transportation costs were picked up by the individual team sponsors, which are either private or government educational bodies. The US team, for example, is organized and sponsored by the American Association of Physics Teachers, with financial support from the American Institute of Physics and its ten member societies, as well as some additional funds from industry; the team’s budget for preparation and training was about \$120 000, without overhead.

This year, for the first time, the olympiad organizers asked for voluntary contributions from participating

teams. But, although most countries willingly contributed (covering about 11% of the total cost), there is a lot of debate about instituting a fee—obligatory or even a formally backed voluntary one—according to olympiad president Waldemar Gorzkowski of Poland, and others.

Several participants suggest that those for and against instituting fees can be divided roughly along the line of private versus government sponsorship. “Those voting against amending the statutes to give formal support to a voluntary fee were almost entirely from countries that can get funding only from governments,” says Neuenschwander. Bernard Khoury, director of the US team, points out that “it is important to be sensitive to the widely varying resources and rules under which the different teams operate.” Next year the olympiad will be held in Sudbury, Ontario.

TONI FEDER

APS Fellowship to Foster Better Science Reporting

The American Physical Society has created a Mass Media Fellowship to enable physics graduate students and recent PhDs to spend several months working at news organizations. The purpose of the fellowship, which will be administered through a similar program run by the American Association for the Advancement of Science, is to improve coverage of physics topics so as to increase the public’s understanding and appreciation of physics.

Ruth Howes, a physics professor at Ball State University who was involved in establishing the fellowship, notes that scientists and reporters have different criteria for judging a news story. Last spring, she and Ball State journalism professor Beverley Pitts surveyed 115 physicists and journalists, who were asked to compare news accounts of recent work by the Collider Detector at Fermilab (CDF) collaboration—namely, data suggesting that quarks may have a substructure. Not surprisingly, the journalists’ critiques focused on the style, structure and context of the stories, while the physicists commented on the science. One article that the journalists considered “more readable,” scientists deemed “grossly oversimplified” and sensationalist.

“If science writers were trained both as scientists and as journalists, there might be a clearer understanding of how the scientific community thinks, solves problems, develops theories and