

Merger of OSA and SPIE Is Rejected

A controversial proposal to merge the Optical Society of America and SPIE—The International Society for Optical Engineering has been defeated. On 29 September, OSA announced that its members had turned down the merger plan by a margin of 51% to 49%. A week later, SPIE reported that its members had approved the merger, also by a 51% to 49% margin. However, passage by both societies had been required, and in OSA's case, by a two-thirds majority. Voter turnout was two-and-a-half times the usual level for society elections.

The proposed merger, which would have joined OSA and SPIE under a new umbrella organization with a single budget, had been hotly debated, as proponents and opponents alike sent around letters and e-mail appeals and posted messages to several on-line discussion groups. The leaders of SPIE came out strongly in favor of the merger, while the OSA board was split (see PHYSICS TODAY, July 1999, page 48). But in the end, noted OSA board member David Pritchard, a critic of the proposal, "the two societies voted within 2% of each other. . . . This [was] a deeply divisive issue in both societies."

The vote lays to rest any possibility of a merger for the foreseeable future, said OSA president Tony Siegman, who had supported the plan. "We'll see if we can find ways to collaborate and cooperate. Each society will still have to worry about its long-term financial stability." The merger "would have been a bold and visionary step," Siegman added. "Obviously, I'm disappointed. But I think each society has gotten to know itself better. The investment of a few hundred thousand dollars by each society was a good one."

Added SPIE president Paul Schenker, "I would hope we all retain the sense of commitment and spiritual partnership—among both the memberships and staffs—that grew significantly during the merger deliberations."

Speaking for the staff of OSA, executive director John Thorner expressed relief that the merger question had been settled. "The staff has been living in a period of uncertainty for the last year and a half." Although the unification plan stated that no large-scale layoffs or relocations would occur, "it still created a lot of nervousness," Thorner noted. "I think we're all looking forward to moving ahead with other issues."

IN BRIEF

Minority scholarships. A foundation created in August by Microsoft Corp chairman Bill Gates and his wife, Melinda, has pledged \$1 billion over the next 20 years to help poor minority students attend college. The foundation's gift, by far the largest ever made to higher education, comes at a time when many public universities are having to contend with anti-affirmative action measures, such as California's Proposition 209 and Washington State's Initiative 200. The Gates Millennium Scholars program will fund 1000 new students each year, starting next fall. It is open to high school seniors and undergraduates nationwide who are African American, Asian American, Hispanic American, or Native American, and who can demonstrate "significant financial need"; minority students pursuing graduate study in engineering, math, science, education, or library science are also eligible. Applications are available on the Web at <http://www.gmsp.org>, or by calling 877-690-4677.

Climate change literature. Last February the American Geophysical Union issued a statement noting the uncertain effects that rising levels of atmospheric carbon dioxide and other so-called greenhouse gases are

having on Earth's climate and calling, in general terms, for further research and emissions reductions. Tamara Ledley, one of the statement's six authors, says that "a number of people wanted to know how we had substantiated the statement. So we decided to write an article that documented the materials we used." Their article, which appeared in the 28 September *Eos*, offers a review of the peer-reviewed literature on climate change and greenhouse gases, including 189 references. It can be found on the Web at http://www.agu.org/eos_elec/99148e.html.

New RSI editor. On 1 January, Albert Macrander will succeed Thomas Braid as editor of *Review of Scientific Instruments*, a monthly journal published by the American Institute of Physics. Braid, a physicist in the reactor engineering division at Argonne National Laboratory, has led the journal for the last 21 years. Macrander, the group leader of the optics fabrication and metrology group at Argonne's Advanced Photon Source, holds a PhD in physics from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. After completing a postdoc at Cornell University, he worked for ten years at AT&T Bell Laboratories in Murray Hill, New Jersey, before joining Argonne in 1990. ■

Web Watch

<http://www.seds.org/billa/tnp>

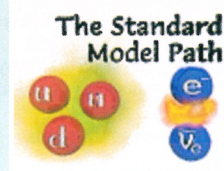
Billed as a multimedia tour of the Solar System, Bill Arnett's Web site, *The Nine Planets*, offers 90 pages of information about Earth, its planetary kin, and their satellites. Aimed at the nonspecialist, the site not only describes the latest scientific theories about the planets, but also covers more arcane snippets, such as how to pronounce the name of Saturn's third largest satellite, Iapetus.

<http://www.discoverengineering.org>

Discover Engineering Online seeks to encourage children to pursue careers in engineering and to celebrate the achievements of the world's engineers. The richly illustrated Web site, which was put together by a team led by the Eastman Chemical Co, emphasizes the importance, creativity, and variety of engineering.

<http://ParticleAdventure.org>

From Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory's particle data group comes *The Particle Adventure*, an educational Web site about fundamental particles and forces. Available in English, French, Polish, Slovak, and Spanish, the site guides its readers down three paths: "Standard Model," "Experimental Evidence," and "Beyond the Standard Model."



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