

FROM THE EDITOR

PHYSICS TODAY has shrunk. This, the January 2000 issue is (in the dreaded English system of units) a quarter of an inch narrower and a bit shorter than last month's issue. The small change in size makes for a large financial savings that, in the final analysis, will help us serve you better. It is just the latest in a string of changes—improvements, we believe—that we have undertaken over the last five years, since I was given the great and enjoyable privilege of serving as the editor.

Looking back, those changes included a complete redesign of the publication, starting in February 1995. That issue also saw the introduction of our one-page “Physics Update” department, which each month highlights examples of current research as chosen by our physicist–editors. The page complements the more in-depth coverage of science found in our “Search and Discovery” department and feature articles. Together, they make up one of PHYSICS TODAY's most important services: keeping you in touch with the science being done outside of your own area of expertise, in language you can understand.

You may have noticed other, more subtle changes. We've increased our coverage of science on the international scene, reflecting our increasingly intertwined world. Also, special issues of PHYSICS TODAY now tend more toward broad multi- and interdisciplinary themes in which we strive to show the unity of the physical sciences. We sometimes cover a single topic in a two-article “Special Focus.” We, or you, could list more changes.

But let's turn 90° and look at where we are, rather than how we got here. Our goal is to keep you, the reader, informed about science and its place in the world. Some of our greatest enjoyment comes from the twin activities of learning about, and then passing on to you, the exciting, creative, and important work taking place in physics and the related sciences. More than this page would be needed just to catalog—let alone really discuss—the recent advances being made in all the fields, whether established or emerging. Physics is exhilarating.

Of course, there's more than the science, both for us and for you. The financial, social, and political realities that our scientific community faces take many forms. Last month, on page 11, Leo Kadanoff insightfully captured many of these changes and challenges. Magazine publishing is not exempt.



Stephen G. Benka

Some of our changes should be invisible to you. Last year, we changed our desktop publishing system to become Y2K compliant. We also are now running on a state-of-the-art press, using huge rolls of paper and the slightly reduced size you've already noticed.

Another 90° turn takes our gaze to the near future. One of our big challenges for this year and beyond is to put the Web to work for you and for us. Since last October, a few staff-selected pieces from each issue have been made available on-line in their entirety, at www.physicstoday.org. We are working to further develop the site by making other, major improvements. So check in frequently. A

particularly attractive feature of the Internet is its provision for rapid two-way communication. PHYSICS TODAY has always provided a forum for the exchange of ideas—mainly through “Letters” and “Opinion” pieces—and we are now exploring ways in which the Web might help us expand this forum.

Throughout our editorial changes, our high editorial standards remain constant. Both journalism and magazine publishing require judgements and decisions, and we have always chosen to follow our own path in serving you, ignoring the whims and fancies of “pack journalism.” No millennium hype here, as we constantly try to cover the ever-broadening scope of the physics-related sciences. Still, it's not always easy to know how well we're doing.

That's why we always appreciate your comments. When you encounter any of us at a meeting or at your institution, let us know what you think. We hope to make feedback mechanisms part of our on-line presence as well. Occasionally, we ask some of you to fill out a reader survey questionnaire. Your well-considered answers provide us with vital information for making editorial decisions that, in turn, help define and redefine the magazine. Should you receive a survey form from us, please seize the opportunity to join our decision-making process. One thing is certain: PHYSICS TODAY will continue to change. With your help, it will continue to change for the better.

So yes, in a way, PT has shrunk. But our content is not diminished, our coverage is not lessened, our standards are not compromised, our vision is not diluted. As Alfred North Whitehead said, “The art of progress is to preserve order amid change and to preserve change amid order.” Let's progress together. ■