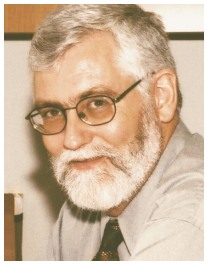
FROM THE EDITOR

Our Community



STEPHEN G. BENKA

Community. The word implies a common bond that goes beyond the superficial. Since the gut-wrenching hijackings, attacks, and plane crashes perpetrated by terrorists in the US on 11 September, new bonds are forming in communities throughout the world. People everywhere continue to come to terms in their own ways both with what happened and with the repercussions. The PHYSICS TODAY community is no different. As we grapple with the meaning of "return to normal" amid a war on terrorism, we feel that the world will never really be the same. Many of us find ourselves bound together not only by our maelstrom of emotions, but also by the desire to do something meaningful without being trivial.

One of those binding emotions is surely a profound sense of loss. From early reports, we know that our scientific community was not spared:

William E. Caswell, 54, a passenger on the flight that crashed into the Pentagon, was a civilian physicist working for the US Navy. The oldest of six siblings, he leaves behind his wife, Jean, and daughter, Jennifer.

Charles S. Falkenberg, 45, was on that same flight, together with his wife, Leslie A. Whittington, and their two children, Zoe and Dana. He developed data delivery systems for oceanographers, ecosystem scientists, and space scientists. They were going to Australia.

Lieutenant Commander Ronald James Vauk, 37, was a Navy reservist doing his annual two-week stint in the Pentagon. He worked at the Johns Hopkins University Applied Physics Laboratory in the submarine technology department. He leaves behind his wife, Jennifer, son, Liam, and a second child due this month.

Carl Max Hammond Jr, 37, a magnetospheric physicist from Sunnyvale, California, was on a hijacked airliner that crashed into one of the World Trade Center towers. He worked for Mitre Corp in Boston.

Mohammed Salauddin Chowdhury, in his late 30s, was a banquet waiter at the WTC's Windows on the World restaurant. He had earned a master's degree in physics in Bangladesh and hoped to get a PhD. His wife gave birth to their second child, a boy, six days after the attack.

The American Institute of Physics, publisher of PHYSICS TODAY, also suffered a loss. John G. Scharf, 29, a consulting engineer making a service call on the 103rd floor of the WTC, was the son of Marie Scharf, a quality control specialist with AIP's journals. He called his father before he died.

Sadly, many more stories of lives cut short remain to be told. Our hearts go out to all those who suffered personal loss.

The members and staff of the AVS Science and Technology Society are a vital part of our community. With their headquarters at 120 Wall Street, mere blocks from ground zero, we are thankful they had no loss of life. They did, however, come back to a crippled infrastructure on 17 September and know more than most of us about the difficulties of returning to "normal."

In the face of massive loss, many members of our community are casting about for meaningful tasks in this altered world. To help recover from the attacks, to further understand the causes and implications, and to try to prevent future occurrences, we try to make use of our unique training as scientists, or our position as educators.

In general, we can all strive to raise the level of debate and discussion with others—family, friends, acquaintances, and colleagues. We can keep well informed about continuing developments on the world scene and examine the issues much like we do physics problems: analytically and from multiple viewpoints.

Our community of scientists is highly international. Indeed, this magazine is regularly delivered to readers in 152 countries, including Afghanistan. We must each embrace the plurality of our world. Recall that, during the height of the cold war, scientists reached across the iron curtain from both sides and worked toward trust, cooperation, and peaceful coexistence. A reminder is close at hand: On page 50 of our June 2001 issue, Joseph Rotblat recalled for us the early days of those efforts.

Today, it is crucial that we work hard to maintain a healthy learning and social environment for international scientists and students who have, unfortunately, faced unwarranted insults, ostracism, threats, and violence in recent weeks in the US. We have all been awakened to danger, but the rational mind must neither admit through its doors nor tolerate paranoia and bigotry.

Many individuals, groups, and organizations have contributed generously to relief funds. A number of scientific societies, including some that belong to AIP, are planning to participate in a general scholarship fund for the children and spouses of those injured or killed in the attacks. Every contribution through these societies will be met with matching funds, with the money earmarked for college tuition for science majors. Next month, we expect to have more information on this program for you.

Some individuals might want to get directly involved with the international fight against terrorism. PHYSICS TODAY has a few tools to help explore such options. In April 2001, in our special issue devoted to careers for physicists, we carried a feature article on page 56 by John Holzrichter that detailed the need for, and some of the difficulties of, attracting and retaining technical talent for US defense. In December 2000, PHYSICS TODAY had five feature articles devoted to national security issues, with Sid Drell as our guest editor. In his own article, he touched on many issues, including cybersecurity and chemical and biological weapons—issues at the fore of the world's consciousness today—and the special responsibilities of the scientific community as a whole.

The physics community has a long tradition of getting involved in pressing social and global issues. Today, we might work to develop military technologies, gather or analyze intelligence, advise the government, or be a government watchdog. We can study the balancing of security with personal rights and civil liberties. While educating the next generation, we must demonstrate the value of internationalism and multiple points of view. And always and everywhere, we must continue to elevate discussions and debates of the issues, with each other and with others around us. Within our community and beyond, such activities carry a new, special poignancy in the wake of 11 September 2001. ■