

FROM THE EDITOR

Constants and changes

Charles Day

The first issue of PHYSICS TODAY came out in May 1948. In his inaugural editorial, founding editor David Katcher explained why the magazine was needed: Physics, like other scientific fields, had become too specialized, both in relation to other fields and within itself. Jargon frustrated understanding and promoted balkanization.

“So the time has come,” he wrote, “to give a brief glimpse of what goes on in the various fields of physics in terms of fundamental concepts rather than as an assortment of unevaluated facts.”

Katcher delivered. His first issue included “Physics and cancer,” a feature article by Harvard University biophysicist and noted art collector Arthur Solomon, and “A newsman looks at physicists,” a feature article by *New York Herald Tribune* reporter and co-instigator of PBS television Stephen White.

Those two articles from nearly 68 years ago encapsulate the enduring mission of PHYSICS TODAY: to report on advances in physics and on the role of physics in the wider world. Defeating cancer continues to preoccupy physicists (see “Imaging particle beams for cancer treatment” by Jerimy Polf and Katia Parodi, PHYSICS TODAY, October 2015, page 28). Physicists still need advice on the ways of the media (see “Talking science with journalists” by Jason Bardi and Catherine Meyers, PHYSICS TODAY, May 2015, page 66).

But no matter how diligently PHYSICS TODAY informs and interests its readers, it remains what it has always been: a magazine. And magazines have another priority: to engage, delight, and surprise. When you opened this issue and scanned the table of contents, I bet you didn’t expect a news story about plans to build a synchrotron light source in Africa or a paean to Edward Purcell’s ability to write a compelling research proposal in just 800 words.

And as soon as you saw the cover, you’d have noticed the magazine’s new look. Graphical fashions change quickly

enough that magazines have to keep up, lest they seem stuffy and dated. Like a new hairstyle or a change of eye-glasses, a new look can revive interest merely through being different. PHYSICS TODAY’s latest redesign has another goal: To present

editorial content in a cleaner, more direct way and to more strongly emphasize figures, photos, and other artwork.

There’s another change at PHYSICS TODAY. This past November, Stephen Benka, who had served as the magazine’s editor-in-chief since 1994, retired. Under Steve’s leadership, the magazine acquired three new departments: Physics Update, Quick Study, and Backscatter. Steve also set out to broaden the magazine’s subject range to reach beyond particle physics, condensed matter, and other bastions. And he was a patient and effective mentor to me and my fellow editors.

As PHYSICS TODAY’s new editor-in-chief, I intend to continue, as Steve once put it, “casting a wide enough net to catch all of the great science that’s being done and getting as much of it as possible into the magazine.” I also intend to revive PHYSICS TODAY’s role as a forum for discussion among its community of readers. Watch out for more commentaries and opinion pieces.

One of my friends wondered why, as the magazine’s former online editor, I’d want to become editor-in-chief of a print magazine. “Print is dead!” she said. Printed newspapers are indeed struggling, but magazines remain vibrant. If anything, magazines are appreciated more than ever. They offer their readers a chance to step away from the office and immerse themselves in engaging, beautifully presented content—which is what the staff of PHYSICS TODAY and I are committed to delivering to you. **PT**



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