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EDITORIAL

Geography Counts

Although it may not be as obvious as it is in real estate, the course of a physicist's career depends heavily on location. Geography dictates the all-important factors of infrastructure, funding, politics and attitude.

For example, in the United States, as in many developed countries, there is a vast infrastructure that supports the work of physicists, despite the vagaries of funding, politics, and changing attitudes. Throughout the Cold War, U.S. physicists enjoyed high levels of political and financial support, although public attitudes were at best ambivalent. As the public has become less threatened by the possibility of war, there has been less willingness to fund big science and some evidence of an anti-science mood. Concurrently, the number of academic posts has diminished and major industrial labs have downsized. Yet product-specific research has increased, providing new opportunities for physicists.

By contrast, in the rapidly developing countries of Asia the scientific and technological infrastructure is less complete, but the funding, politics, and attitudes are, in some cases, very positive. Our feature article on page 18 reveals the staggering amount of funding that is being pumped into Asian R&D, and the ramifications of this spending to physicists and companies around the world. Physics is a top choice for Korean undergraduates, largely because their parents consider it a prestige degree, according to Sook-Il Kwun, president of the Korean Physical Society, who wrote the article on page 26.

Now think about a developing country, where there is very little scientific and technological infrastructure, and where the politics, funding, and attitudes to science can be negative. Here it is a challenge for a physicist to remain motivated to succeed. What to do? Changing location may not be an option. In this case, it is the physicist's own positive attitude that becomes the most important factor in determining the progress of his or her career. After all, solving problems is what physics is all about.

Take the case of "Venky" Venkatesan, albeit back in the U.S.A. When Venky was invited to become professor of physics and electrical engineering at the University of Maryland College Park in 1990, he asked if he could bring with him his fledgling business, Neocera, Inc. At the time, this was considered a conflict of interests. But Venky and the UM administration persisted until the law could be changed. Neocera was nursed in the university incubator, recently moved out to a nearby industrial park, and is now a recognized leader in the technology of thin-film technology (see page 22).

The Industrial Physicist is dedicated to providing physicists in industry with the kind of information that helps them do their jobs better no matter where they are. In this issue, we focus on Asia. Our global journey has only just begun. In future issues we will cover physics and physicists wherever the trail may lead.

Ken McNaughton
Associate Publisher

THE INDUSTRIAL PHYSICIST (ISSN 1082-1848; CODEN INPHFA), volume 2, number 3, is published by the American Institute of Physics, 500 Sunnyside Boulevard, Woodbury, NY 11797. **Subscriptions**. *The Industrial Physicist* is available on a free subscription basis to qualified parties who fill in, sign, and mail the enclosed form. Nonqualified parties may subscribe at the following annual rates: members of affiliated societies, $18; non-member individuals, $24; institutions, $48. Please add $15 for foreign delivery via surface mail (including Canada and Mexico) and $30 for international delivery by expedited air freight. Single copies are available for $20 (postage paid). Contact the editorial office. **Other information**. For change of address and other subscription information contact *The Industrial Physicist*, P.O. Box 96000, Collingswood NJ 08108-9944; tel. 609-488-1881; fax. 609-488-6188.