



Editorial

Jack D. Gaskill, Editor

**Is Photonics the Answer?**

It may be one of nature's unfathomable mysteries, as I have noted previously, but readers of the journal have actually taken the time to read some of my past editorials. Not only that, both of these individuals have responded with letters addressing editorial topics of special interest to them. The most recent letter came from Sastry Pappu in response to my April Fool's editorial that appeared in the April 1990 issue of the journal. Enclosed with his letter was a preprint of an article, entitled "Photonics: Contemporary and Correct Name for Optics," that he had submitted for publication in *Physics Education*, a quarterly journal of higher education sponsored by University Grants Commission, Government of India, New Delhi.

The stated purpose of Sastry's article is to present a case for elevating the status of optics to place it on a par with the disciplines of mathematics, physics, chemistry, electronics, etc. He points out that electronics, which is a very diverse discipline, has an identity that is entirely separate from physics. He then suggests that, because optics is equally diverse, it deserves an equally independent identity to free it from its historical position as a subfield of physics. Finally, he argues that a rechristening of optics as photonics would facilitate the achievement of the desired disciplinary parity. I do not have the space to present all of Sastry's supporting comments, which seem quite sound, but I tend to agree with his thesis.

I realize that, by bringing up this subject once again, I may be reopening an old can of worms. However, such a threat has never stopped me from writing in the past and I think it important to continue the debate. What is so horrible, or detrimental, about simply giving optics a new name? Not just any new name, but a new name derived as logically as was the name electronics—a new name that might help reduce confusion about the field of optics for those not directly involved in it, which includes the general public, educational institutions, industrial corporations, and governmental agencies. One immediate benefit would, of course, be a reduction in the number of requests for those of us in the field to prescribe contact lenses and to repair eyeglasses, and that alone would make it worth the trouble. Seriously, however, there might even be quite substantial and long-lasting benefits related to education, funding for research, procurement, etc.

How about the matter of societal name changes? Even if everyone agreed to a redefinition of optics, would it be possible for them to agree on name changes for their professional societies? Probably not until the Devil's lair reaches cryogenic temperatures. Nevertheless, I am going to tackle this subject with the reckless abandon of a noncombatant. Would a reasonable name for what is now the Optical Society of America be the Photonical Society of America? Or, should it simply be the Photon (or Photonics) Society of America? If any of these names were to be adopted, OSA would then become PSA (which was already absorbed by US Air a few years ago). And would SPIE—The Society of Photo-Optical Instrumentation Engineers become SPIE—The Society of Photonically Inclined Engineers? Might that society's Board of Governors (now Directors, I think) ever drop "SPIE" and simply become the Interna-

tional Society of Photonic Engineers? I haven't a clue at the moment as to which, if any, of these changes might ever be adopted, but it is nevertheless interesting to contemplate them.

I will leave you with some comments on a different subject: the previously reported correlation between the temporal proximity of the annual meeting of the Optical Society of America and record-setting plunges of the Dow Jones industrial average. I have been studying the statements and analyses of various financial experts in recent times, and I now feel that I have sufficient knowledge about these matters to make a prediction. I predict that, on or about 2 November 1990, on or about 13 November 1990, or sometime during the intervening week, various misleading economic indicators will cause the Dow Jones industrial average to rise either sharply or marginally, to fall either precipitously or undramatically, or to remain spectacularly unchanged—depending, of course, on whether the bad news is bad news or the good news is bad news.

**Notice to Contributors**  
Beginning Jan. 1, 1991, contributed manuscripts should be sent to the editor-elect, Dr. Brian J. Thompson, *Optical Engineering*, 692 Mount Hope Ave., Rochester, NY 14620. Manuscripts invited for Special Issue sections of the journal should continue to be sent to the appropriate Guest Editor.

**OPTICAL ENGINEERING EDITORIAL SCHEDULE**

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Mark A. Ealey  
Litton-Itek Optical Systems  
10 Maguire Road  
Lexington, MA 02173-3199  
617/276-2269

*December 1990*

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Firooz Sadjadi and  
Hatem Nasr  
Honeywell Systems & Research  
Center  
3600 Technology Drive  
MN 65-2300  
Minneapolis, MN 55418  
612/782-7543

*January 1991*

**Lidar**

John A. Reagan  
University of Arizona  
Dept. of Electrical and Computer  
Engineering  
Tucson, AZ 85721  
602/621-6203

*June 1991*

**Optical Fiber Reliability**

Hakan H. Yuce  
Bell Communications  
Research  
MRE 2L-165  
445 South Street  
Morristown, NJ 07962-1910  
201/829-4945

*July 1991*

**Visual Communications and Image Processing III**

Kou-Hu Tzou  
Bell Communications  
Research  
Room 3B-311  
331 Newman Springs Road  
Red Bank, NJ 07701-7020  
201/758-2857

Hsueh-Ming Hang  
AT&T Bell Laboratories  
Room 4C-520  
Crawfords Corner Road  
Holmdel, NJ 07733-1988  
201/949-5296