



What's Hot?

It was a blast!

Certainly I anticipated that Photonics West 2001 in San Jose would be an exciting event. But it was better than anyone expected. For me, the first inkling that this was a different kind of SPIE conference came on Saturday night, the first day of BiOS, the Biomedical Optics conference. I had the privilege of presenting the SPIE Directors Award to Professor Abraham Katzir of Tel Aviv University. Abraham has been one of the prime movers of the biomedical optics program for SPIE. He had not been able to attend the Annual Meeting in July, so the award, which recognized his contribution to the Society and the field, was presented that night.

It was given before the Saturday Night Hot Topics, a series of 10-minute reviews of current trends by leaders of biomedical optics. The first was given by Professor Britton Chance of Penn, a pioneer of biomedical optics. My own contact with things biological occurred quite a while ago when I was doing Raman spectroscopy of teeth (hydroxyapatite) and snake venom. Since then the field has developed marvelous new techniques for diagnosis, analysis, and treatment. The interest in these topics can be gauged by the attendance at the Hot Topics session. Granted the local hockey team, the San Jose Sharks, was not playing at home, but the auditorium in the convention center certainly contained the most excitement to be found in downtown San Jose that Saturday night. The room seated about 400. Every seat was filled; latecomers were parked along the walls and stacked up in the entry alcoves. There was a sense of excitement, a "buzz" in that room. And it was the first of many I encountered that week.

The conference sessions were well attended. That Saturday night scene was repeated numerous times during the course of Photonics West. As attendees craned their necks to get a better view of the slides projected on screens, SPIE staff scrambled to provide larger rooms when possible. It was not just the technical sessions that produced marked enthusiasm. The short courses, aug-

mented by a fresh set of offerings in the telecommunication field, were also well attended, with a number of them filled to capacity. Another gauge of the interest in the opportunities offered in San Jose was the fact that all of the downtown hotels and practically every bed in the South Bay area between the San Francisco airport and the convention center were occupied.

And then there was the show! It was the largest, most elaborate exhibition that SPIE has ever put on. If there was a "buzz" in the conference sessions, there was also one at the show. I didn't get to the convention center for the exhibits until Wednesday, but I had heard that the exhibition was impressive. As I walked the aisle at a deliberate pace, it was difficult to take in all of the trends in technology and contact old friends at the booths and in the aisles. There were so many exhibits that the show overflowed across the street to a second exhibition hall. To assure that attendees were aware of these other exhibits a red carpet started at the door of the convention center and was laid across the street to the second site. To further encourage attendees to visit the second hall, the poster sessions were located there. I have been to a number of exhibitions on optics and photonics, but this was one of the best I have ever attended. As I think of the size and content of the shows not that many years ago at OE-LASE at the LA Airport Marriott, it is amazing how far the field of optical engineering has come. The sophistication, reliability, and economy demanded by the users of optical systems has resulted in incredibly clever devices that were impossible to contemplate, let alone build, then.

At the end of it all, one week after the BiOS conferences started that Saturday, 15,362 authors, conference chairs, attendees, short course students, exhibitors, and exhibit visitors came to Photonics West 2001. The 103 short courses were taken by 3500 persons. In addition, the Career Center was used by 55 companies and 329 resumes were available. And 620 exhibitors arranged over 70,924 square feet showed a wide range of products and services. All of this was arranged, tracked, and tweaked by numerous SPIE staff and contractors. Richard Hoover, the 2001 SPIE President, and all SPIE members have much to be proud of.

One concern expressed by some at Photonics West was that the event would evolve into a trade show, where the

emphasis would shift from a balance of technology and ideas to the display and sale of products. To guard against this change the organizers of the conferences and the SPIE technical directors must work to create and update the technical conference and education programs, so that our members and others in the optics community are exposed to the latest and most important advances in photonics. So, on a Saturday night in downtown San Jose at the

end of January 2002, a group of biomedical researchers will gather. I may not make the Saturday night session, but I'll be at PW 2002 to find out what's hot in optics and photonics.

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