

## Prizes for Mentors

■ **Inventiveness** – Max Planck Institutes are renowned for their outstanding scientific achievements. Their Directors enjoy an excellent reputation, and both their laboratories and libraries are known to be well stocked. What is less well known is that many institutes have their own workshops and development labs that carry out innovative work in their own right. In this issue, under the heading “Fascinating Research,” we would like to introduce you to the Department of Mechanics at the Max Planck Institute for Physics. The staff here develop their own technical aids to assist scientists in setting up their experiments. Without their assistance, many research projects would never happen. Our own Max Planck workshops and laboratories also regularly succeed in devising inventions that possess considerable industrial value. The Max Planck Institute for Physics again provides us with an example: its semiconductor laboratory has developed entirely new types of detectors that convert radiation into electrical signals – a technology that is not commercially available. This not only puts the institute’s scientific work at the international forefront, but also the laboratory itself.

■ **Encouragement** – There is another aspect of our institutes that is also rarely in the limelight, despite its long-term effects – namely the training of young scientists. In the past year alone, around 9,500 junior researchers have been working at our institutes, from student assistants and graduates to Ph.D. students and postdocs. Just how much these young people value the encouragement they receive at Max Planck Institutes is demonstrated by the two awards for special commitment to the promotion of young scientists recently presented to two of our Directors at the instigation of former students: Klaus J. Hopt, retired Director at the MPI for Comparative and International Private Law, received the Prize for Mentorship presented by the Claussen Simon Foundation in Hamburg; and one of the Nature Awards for Mentoring in Science 2008, presented for the first time in Germany, went to Heinrich Betz, Director at the MPI for Brain Research. Congratulations!

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■ **Increase** – Some positive news has just reached us from the Joint Science Conference (GWK): The German federal and state governments have agreed to continue the Pact for Research and Innovation through

2015. The Max Planck Society and the other research organizations can thus look forward to continuing regular increases in their budgets. Especially in light of the current financial crisis, we are deeply grateful to our sponsors for this clear signal. The Federal Chancellor and the Minister for Research have actively come out in favor of an annual increase in our budgets of at least 5 percent – a proposal we warmly welcome. Not least because it has recently become evident that the current 3 percent growth is almost entirely consumed by massive cost increases. This means that, beyond maintaining the status quo, we currently have little or no scope for new research ideas,



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and especially for new institutes. And yet Max Planck scientists have identified a whole range of forward-looking research areas. The field of autonomous systems, including robotics, sensors, learning machines and human-computer interfaces, is one example. Another is the search for the origins of life: using innovative methods of synthetic biology, it might be possible to gain some important information on the chemical and structural preconditions of life. There is no lack of exciting scientific questions that the Max Planck Society is eager to answer. If for no other reason than to keep pace with dynamic developments in other countries, such as many in Asia, German science needs to be given the opportunity for science-driven growth. If the new Pact for Research can ensure real increases for the future, that would fulfill one essential requirement.

*P. Gruss*