

# The California Tech

PASADENA, CALIFORNIA

FEBRUARY 2, 2004

## Ready to Take Deep Promises

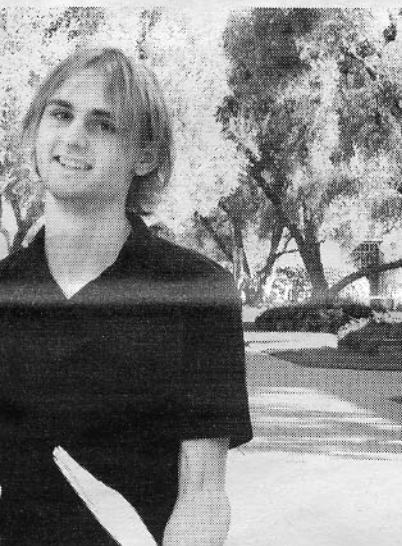
EVIN BARTZ

ays CIT establishment.  
"He got my vote," said outgoing ASCIT President Tom Fletcher '04. "I like the way he handles people. I'm very impressed at the friendships he manages to maintain across so many different lines, at how well he knows people across all of the seven houses while still being a hardcore Scurve while still managing to schmooze with faculty as well. I literally think of him as a coalition-builder."

And that coalition came out en masse last Monday, handing a supermajority of votes in this year's ASCIT presidential election to the outgoing BoC Chair who'd just dyed his hair bright blue.

Two-year BoD member Andrea Vasconcellos '05 came in second with just under 30% of the 352 votes cast; writer and talking head Libin Zhang '05 placed

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L. Tran/The California Tech  
; Galen Loram is ready to accept the  
d listen to student concerns.



D. Korta/The California Tech

Ig Nobel Prize founder Marc Abrahams explains why he started the yearly prize, which honors accomplishments that "make people laugh, then make them think."

## Ig Nobel Prize Recipients Induce Humor, Thought with Triumphs

By CHRISTINE CHANG

Each October, the dignified halls of Harvard University host a ceremony attended by multitudes of people, including Nobel Laureates, to honor people who advanced their respective fields with valuable achievements.

Celebrating accomplishments such as Murphy's Law and the creation of the Association of Dead People, the Ig Nobel Prizes celebrates those discoveries which "make people LAUGH, then make them THINK."

"Nothing would seem like a

breakthrough unless it seemed funny or ludicrous at first," said Marc Abrahams, editor and co-founder of the "Annals of Improbable Research" and father and master of ceremonies of the Ig Noble Prizes, in a talk in Beckman Auditorium on Wednesday January 28.

The list of 2003 winners included Dr. John Paul Stapp, Edward A. Murphy, Jr. and George Nichols, the creators of Murphy's Law which states, "If there are two or more ways to do something and one of those ways can result in a catastrophe, someone will do it."

During his speech, Abrahams invited two special guests onto the stage to talk about Murphy's Law: Nicholas T. Spark who has researched and written an article about the history of the theory and Nichols. With characteristic humor, Abrahams limited each speaker to five minutes, even choosing an audience member to act as time keeper.

Both Spark and Nichols devoted their five minutes to Stapp, a pivotal member of the experiment which gave rise to Murphy's Law. Studying the limitations of the

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# Murphy's Law Creators, Legally Dead Activist Among Winners

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amount of force a human body could withstand during extreme deceleration, a team of scientists which included Nichols and Stapp performed experiments at Edwards Air Force Base in the 1940's.

Originally designed to use dummies as subjects, the experiments consisted of a "human decelerator" with a 45-foot braking system and 1,000-pound-thrust rockets which would be propelled down a railroad track and then suddenly stopped.

Upon being assigned on the project, Stapp said while patting a dummy, "We won't be using this. We're going to be using human subjects," Nichols recalls.

Stapp volunteered to act as the subject, suffering multiple injuries, including hemorrhaged eyes from a run when the decelerator hurtled down the track at 630 miles per hour and was stopped in one-sixteen-hundredth of a second.

Through all the pain, however, Spark notes that Stapp never lost his sense of humor.

"Human aptitude for ineptitude makes any human discovery a miracle," Stapp said, according to Nichols. Similarly, Murphy's Law also arose from this project and the shrewd observations of Stapp.

After both Spark and Nichols exhausted each of their five minutes, Abrahams once again took the stage and resumed to list the 2003 winners of the Ig Nobel Prizes, eliciting peals of laughter from the audience.

The list included Yukio Hirose from Kanazawa University, who won the Ig Nobel Prize for Chemistry for his chemical investigation of a bronze statue which mysteriously did not attract pigeons.

The Ig Nobel Prize for Economics was awarded to Karl Schwarzler and the nation of Liechtenstein for making their entire country available for rent for corporate conventions, weddings, bar mitzvahs and other such gatherings.

Other winners were Lal Bihari, who captured the Ig Nobel Prize for Peace, for leading an active life though legally dead, campaigning posthumously against "bureaucratic inertia and greedy relatives," and founding the Association of Dead People.

In rural regions of India, such as where Bihari resided, relatives gaining to inherit could bribe bureaucrats to declare an individual legally dead, which occurred to Bihari. However, he fought back, contacting others who had suffered the same fate and organizing them to protest.

"He was literally giving people their lives back. Few people have to do their best work after their dead," said Abrahams with a smile.

In accordance with the bizarre nature of the winners' accomplishments, the Ig Nobel ceremony blends humor and informality to provide a night of entertainment.

"The 1200 person hall at Harvard is dripping with dignity, except on the night of the Ig Nobel

Prizes," said Abrahams.

Each year, the ceremony is given a theme, such as "Nano," which was this year's theme. Everything, from the awards, which this year featured a transparent plastic cube which, Abrahams said, "contained a solid gold bar one nanometer long," to the annual opera revolves around this theme.

However, one aspect which remains constant from year to year is the involvement of real Nobel Prize winners in the ceremony as the presenters of the awards and singers or actors in the opera.

"Sometimes, the Nobel Prize winner is more excited to meet the Ig Nobel Prize winner. Each time they meet, it is a magical moment, like two opposites facing each other," Abrahams said.

Abrahams began his career as an editor in 1990 with the "Journal of Irreproducible Results." After the publisher decided to end the project in 1994, the founders and the editorial staff left the publisher and established the "Annals of Improbable Research."

On the editorial board, the magazine boasts more than fifty scientists, eight Nobel Laureates and the IQ record holder, as well as a convicted felon.

Abrahams graduated from Harvard, noting wryly that he was only one year behind Bill Gates. "Apparently my mistake was in graduation college," he said.

Abrahams continued to speak with his wry humor until the end of his speech, which he ended as he ends every Ig Nobel Prize ceremony.

"If you did not win an Ig Nobel Prize this year and especially if you did, good luck next year."

## Inventor of Technique