Pinboard

A RESTLESS SPIRIT – A gift that echoed throughout the day: For his 80th birthday, Hans Zacher requested harp music to please his wife – a request that was fulfilled by Sophia Steckeler, who provided a musical accompaniment to the celebration. Max Planck President Peter Gruss recalled the achievements of his pre-predecessor, who headed the Max Planck Society from 1990 until 1996. As a legal specialist,Zacher was the only representative of the humanities among the presidential ranks. He was also the only one to be confronted with a unique challenge: the reunification of Germany. As a first step in an immediate action program, Zacher facilitated the founding of working groups at East German universities. Between 1991 and 1998, 18 Max Planck Institutes were created in the newly-formed German federal states with impressive speed. "A certain streak of Bavarian stubbornness," as President Gruss put it, may well have helped Zacher withstand the then-prevailing pressures. The current President also praised the judicious manner in which Zacher simultaneously implemented the program to consolidate the West German Max Planck Institutes. To this day, Hans Zacher is actively involved in research as an emeritus member of staff at the Max Planck Institute for Foreign and International Social Law in Munich.



New Vice Presidents of the Max Planck Society: Wolfgang Schön, Martin Stratmann and Stefan Marcinowski (from left).

NEW FACES IN MANAGEMENT – At its recent meeting, the Senate of the Max Planck Society elected three new Vice Presidents: representing the Chemistry, Physics and Technology Section, Martin Stratmann (Director at the Max Planck Institute for Iron Research); for the Humanities Section, Wolfgang Schön (Director at the Max Planck Institute for Intellectual Property, Competition and Tax Law); and, as non-scientific Vice President, Stefan Marcinowski, Member of the Executive Board of the chemicals group BASF. Vice President Herbert Jäckle (Max Planck Institute for Biophysical Chemistry) and Treasurer Hans-Jürgen Schinzler, Chairman of the Supervisory Board of Münchener Rückversicherungs-Gesellschaft, were confirmed in office for a further term. Günter Stock, who heads the Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences, also continues to serve as Vice President. His term of office runs until the General Meeting in 2011. Two new members of the Executive Committee were also elected: publisher Stefan von Holtzbrinck and Nikolaus Schweickart. Schweickart was Chairman of the Management Board of chemicals company Altana until 2007 and now heads its cultural foundation. The Vice Presidents and the Treasurer, along with two to four additional members and the President, collectively make up the Executive Committee. Together with the General Secretary, they constitute the Management Board of the MPS.

ADOPT AND ADAPT – "Nature has a head start of many millions of years, but we're catching up." The work done by Robert Langer – from whose laboratory in the US this maxim originates – and Peter Fratzl in the field of biomimetics seems simple at first glance, even if it takes staying power. The two recipients of the 2008 Max Planck Research Prize are engaged in an investigation of the structures of plants and animals in order to identify specific functions that can be carried over to entirely different systems. At the prize presentation held during the Max Planck Society annual meeting in Dresden, the 59-year-old American from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and the 49-year-old Austrian Director at the Max Planck Institute for Colloids and Interfaces offered insight into their methods. These have, particularly in the case of chemical engineer Robert Langer, already resulted in numerous products – such as a dressing that stays in place without adhesive. Langer is also persistently working to develop macromolecules from special polymers that can channel drugs directly into cancer cells. Peter Fratzl's current hobbyhorse is the Venus flower basket, *Euplectella aspergillum*. This deep-sea sponge seems like it is made of glass, but does not break. In order to study its extremely resilient skeleton more closely, his team first had to develop the appropriate tools. Fratzl has since recreated wood and bone structures in order to determine whether it is possible to imitate the natural originals. He has his sights set not only on new materials, but also on entirely new design and construction strategies. He and his colleague Robert Langer were each awarded 750,000 euros to finance further outstanding achievements with the aim that Max Planck Research Prize winners should primarily include junior scientists in their work and pursue international cooperation.

Photos: MPS