American Institute of Physics announces awards for best science writing

February 13 2008

The American Institute of Physics (AIP) announced the winners of its 2007 Science Writing Awards today. The winners -- a scientist, a journalist, a children's book author, and three radio broadcasters -- will receive a prize of $3,000, an engraved Windsor chair, and certificates of recognition.

The winners and their award-winning pieces:

-- Tim Folger won the 2007 AIP Science Writing Award in the Journalist category for his Discover Magazine article, "If an Electron can be in Two Places at Once, Why Can’t You?" See: discovermagazine.com/2005/jun/cover.

-- James Trefil won the 2007 AIP Science Writing Award in the Scientist category for his Astronomy Magazine article, "Where is the Universe Heading?" See: www.astronomy.com/trefil.

-- Jacob Berkowitz won the 2007 AIP Science Writing Award in the Children’s category for his book "Jurassic Poop," which was published by Kids Can Press. For more information, see: www.jacobberkowitz.com.

-- Bob McDonald, Pat Senson, and Jim Handman are the co-winners of the 2007 AIP Science Writing Award in the Broadcast category for their production "Multiple Worlds, Parallel Universes," which aired on the CBC Radio show Quirks & Quarks. A recording of the broadcast can be
"These outstanding writers and broadcasters have each improved the general public's appreciation of physics, astronomy, and related sciences through their creative endeavors," says James Stith, AIP Vice President, Physics Resources. "We are pleased to be able to recognize such excellent work."

Highlights of the award-winning pieces:

GRAVITY'S EFFECT ON A SPECK OF DUST Tim Folger recalls how he came upon the topic for his article on quantum weirdness. He heard about Roger Penrose's thousand-page tome, "The Road to Reality" and about a space-based experiment Penrose was proposing to measure the effect of gravity on a speck of dust.

Quantum mechanics says something about how we measure the world but not about the world itself, says Folger. There is no widespread agreement on what the theory says about reality. Penrose hopes to remedy this. His experiment would consist of observing the effect of gravity on a tiny mirror the size of a speck of dust, showing that it can reside in two places at once only briefly before collapsing into a single location.

Folger spent a week talking to Penrose prior to writing his award-winning article. "It was fun meeting with him," says Folger, "but it took a little time to figure out what he was saying."

In addition to his magazine work, Folger is the series editor for "The Best American Science and Nature Writing," an annual anthology. He lives with his wife Anne in a small town in northern New Mexico, where he is currently writing a new book. His award will be presented during the American Physical Society March Meeting in New Orleans.
FINDING THE ORDER IN THE UNIVERSE

James Trefil's article "Where is the Universe Heading" is about the latest concepts in cosmology, a field that has matured in recent years as scientists like Trefil have come to find answers to longstanding questions -- only to discover new questions in the process.

The article discusses dark matter, dark energy, and what the new cosmology tells us about the fate of the universe. Cosmologists have long debated whether the universe contains enough energy to continue expanding or whether the expansion would eventually halt and then contract. The measurement of the amount of dark energy in the universe in recent years has shown that there is enough of this energy to prevent gravity from someday collapsing the universe in upon itself. Because most of the energy in the universe is dark, however, we do not know if the expansion will keep accelerating or if the acceleration will peter out.

"Physics is a place where you can take something that looks messy and unconnected and see the order in the chaos," says Trefil, who has written more than 40 books about science for the general public. "Once you have done that, you can explain it."

Trefil is the Clarence J. Robinson Professor of Physics at George Mason University in Fairfax, VA. He has also served as contributing editor for science for "USA Today Weekend" and has been a regular contributor for "Smithsonian" and "Astronomy." His award will be presented during an awards ceremony at the American Physical Society April Meeting on Sunday April 13, 2008 in St. Louis, MO.

DRAWERS FULL OF THE STUFF

Jacob Berkowitz first caught wind of his subject matter while working as a science educator at the Canadian Museum of Natural History several years ago. His job allowed him to examine pieces of the dinosaur collection that were not available to the public, and that was where he first discovered the ancient poop.
"They had drawers full of the stuff," he says, recalling what inspired him to tackle Jurassic Poop. He recalls being blown away that "something soft and ooey and gooey" could survive for millions of years. In addition to the book, Berkowitz has evolved a storytelling performance on the same subject. "Kids love the poopiness of it," he adds.

Berkowitz is an author, playwright and journalist who lives in Almonte, Ontario. His writing combines a passion for science and storytelling. His award was announced on January 23, 2008 at the American Association of Physics Teachers' winter meeting in Baltimore, MD.

PARALLEL UNIVERSES Jim Handman, Bob McDonald, and Pat Senson are part of the team of journalists and other radio professionals who produce "Quirks & Quarks," which executive producer Handman describes as "the science show that defies gravity." Broadcast by CBC Radio in Canada and available around the world as a podcast, the show is a combination of breaking science news and in-depth documentaries.

The winning segment, "Multiple Worlds, Parallel Universes," was Senson's brain-child. "One of the things that I find interesting about physics is that there is more out there than we can experience with our eyes and ears," Senson says. "I thought it was time to explore the idea."

Begun in 1975, "Quirks & Quarks" is the oldest radio science show in the world. In 2003, the same team of Handman, McDonald, and Senson won the AIP Science Writing Award in the Broadcast category for their broadcast "It’s About Time." They will be presented with their 2007 award at a ceremony during the 2008 summer meeting of the American Association of Physics Teachers in Edmonton, Alberta.

Source: American Institute of Physics