

Nobel winners helped by independence, coffee

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Nobel Economics Prize laureates from USA, Oliver E. Williamson, left, University of California Berkeley, and Elinor Ostrom, Indiana University seated during a press conference at the Royal Academy of Sciences in Stockholm, Sweden Monday Dec, 7, 2009. The 2009 Nobel prizes will be handed over to the laureates by the Swedish king on Thursday. (AP Photo/Scanpix Sweden/Bertil Ericson)

(AP) -- Intellectual freedom, independent research and frequent coffee breaks with colleagues helped this year's Nobel Prize winners make their groundbreaking scientific discoveries.

The winners of the 2009 Nobel Prizes in economics, chemistry and physics on Monday praised all these factors for their success.

American physics prize winner George E. Smith said scientists at the Bell Laboratories where he worked "largely ignored" topdown decisions and achieved good results through collaboration.

"There were a lot of good people, in fact an abundance of good people, and they interacted very strongly together, which was the important thing," Smith told reporters in the Swedish capital.

Smith will share one-half of the 10 million kronor (\$1.4 million) prize with American Willard S. Boyle for inventing a sensor used in digital cameras. The other half of the physics prize will go to Charles K. Kao, also from the U.S., for discovering how to transmit light signals long distances through hair-thin glass fibers.

Boyle said the freedom to chose his own research field was key to his success.

American scientist Thomas A. Steitz, who will share the chemistry prize with Venkatraman Ramakrishnan of the U.S. and Israeli Ada E. Yonath, said coffee breaks enabled him to discuss research with colleagues.

"What a fabulous place! [Coffee](#) in the morning, lunch in the afternoon, tea in the afternoon, I wondered how does anyone get any science done," he recalled about his first day at Cambridge University in 1967. "It's because they are talking to each other and they are learning what experiments they should do."

Economics prize winner Elinor Ostrom said she had a similar experience at Arizona State University's Center for the Study of Institutional Diversity, which she set up with her husband.

"Development of good, solid, science requires environments in which you can discuss future ideas, sum up your recent findings, sum up your

puzzles," the 76-year-old professor said. "I have benefited greatly from that environment."

Ostrom will share the economics award with fellow American Oliver E. Williamson for their work on the analysis of economic governance.

Sweden's King Carl XVI Gustaf will present the awards to the laureates Thursday, including literature prize winner, Romanian-born German writer Herta Mueller, who won for her critical depiction of life behind the Iron Curtain, and the American medicine prize winners Elizabeth H. Blackburn, Carol W. Greider and Jack W. Szostak.

President Barack Obama will travel to the Norwegian capital, Oslo, on Thursday to receive the Peace Prize at a separate ceremony, in line with the 1895 will of prize founder Alfred Nobel.

Nobel's will stipulated that the prizes, first handed out in 1901, should be given to those who "have conferred the greatest benefit on mankind" in their respective fields.

The award ceremonies will be followed by lavish banquets at which the laureates dine with Scandinavian royals, university professors, politicians and foreign diplomats.

On the Net: <http://www.nobelprize.org>

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