



Contact

Publication of the Cleveland Section of the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers.

Science Fair Award Winners

By Jerry Lucak

THE 2001 NORTHEAST OHIO SCIENCE & ENGINEERING FAIR was held at John Carroll University on March 6th. Almost 500 top finishers at area competitions proudly displayed their projects. These were divided into three grade levels and eight categories. Once again, the Cleveland Section won special awards for the best projects in 'Electricity, Electronics or Magnetism'.

Our winner at the 11-12 level was Elizabeth Wood of Shaker Heights. She constructed an "Autonomous Robot - the Trajectory of a Falling Dog" to examine the complex movements of a four-legged animal.

Tamara Broderick, a sophomore at Laurel School, wins our 9-10 award. She used Legos, a microcomputer board and C programming to develop an "Autonomous Stair-Ascending Robot".

"An Investigation of the Effects of Electromagnetic Strengths on Electric Motors" garnered Jeremiah Dunleavy the award at the 7-8 level. He attends St. Marks School in Cleveland.

Congratulations to this year's winners. And thanks to Dick Carlson for once again sharing the judging responsibilities.

MIREA Meeting Scheduled to Be a Real Picnic!

May 24, 2001, at NASA

By Vincent Lalli

Our May 24, 2001, meeting will be The Spring Steak of Fish Roast at NASA Picnic Grounds. We will hold a social period at 4:30 PM, with dinner served at 5:30. Cost is \$11.00 per person. IEEE members should contact Vince Lalli at (216) 433-2354 for reservations.

Cleveland Engineering Society Events

The following upcoming events for CES are open to all. For additional information and reservations, call The Cleveland Engineering Society, (216) 361-3100 or use the website listed.

May

11 CES Environmental Division's "Wetlands: A Confusing Intersection of Law and Biology"...

http://www.cesnet.org/weblinker/ces_upc/2001042600.html

14 CES/CTSC 55th Annual Scholarship and Awards Banquet...

http://www.cesnet.org/weblinker/ces_upc/2001042000.html

16 CES Healthcare Division's "2001 Joint Commission 'EC' Update"...

http://www.cesnet.org/weblinker/ces_upc/2001042601.html

Please note that the MoT Conference originally scheduled for May has been rescheduled for July 26, 2001. It will still be held at the Ohio Aerospace Institute... (http://www.cesnet.org/weblinker/ces_upc/2001022801.html)

POSITION AVAILABLE

Portland, OR test & measurement firm seeking experienced engineer, preferably manager or project leader of electronics instrumentation company. Benefits include stock options, base salary plus sizeable bonus, totaling in the \$150k+ range. Contact Andy Wihtol, (503) 635-7222, or email engleader@andysrch.com.



PATENT NEWS REEL

By Michael Garvey

Patents, trademarks and other forms of intellectual property usually don't get much attention. These are valuable rights for businesses and a few individuals. But they usually aren't exciting enough to get much attention from the media.

In some ways, this is a good thing. Since few people vote based on a politician's position on intellectual property law, Congress tends to modify these laws only when necessary. Special interest groups don't have much interest or influence in intellectual property legislation.

Things are starting to change. Nearly five years ago, Congress extracted the teeth of medical procedure patents. Now, patents on medical procedures are unenforceable. The idea is that medical procedures are important and access should not be denied by patents. On the other hand, patents provide an incentive to create new procedures. Without this incentive, it is likely that many procedures would not exist.

Thus, there are two views: with patents, access to existing procedures is limited. Without patents, fewer new procedures are created. Both affect the cost and type of treatment available. The first view, however, is more direct and easier to understand. As a result, that's how Congress voted. Although most people in Congress probably opposed the law, few wanted to be known as the politician who opposed access to lifesaving medical procedures.

More recently, Amazon.com was awarded a patent for "one-click shopping". This created an uproar that such a thing should not be patentable. "If this is patentable, others will have to use two clicks, which is less efficient." Something similar could have been said of Edison's light bulb. "If this is patentable, others will have to use gas lamps, which are less efficient." As industry turns from manufacturing to services and information, so, too, must the protection of intellectual property.

Thus, the question is not whether business methods in general are patentable, but whether a particular method seeking patent protection is novel.

Intellectual property in the news may have peaked with the Napster case. I covered this in the November, 2000 "Contact." Suffice it to say that those supporting unauthorized and unrewarded copying of music might feel differently if it were

their property being misappropriated.

Currently, patents on AIDS drugs sold in South Africa are in the news. The common view is that patents exclude competition and maintain artificially high prices. This is true, but is not necessarily bad. Patents are intended to exclude competition and maintain higher prices to reward the owners for introducing new products to the market. Moreover, many of the reports compare the selling price to the cost of manufacturing and distribution.

This ignores costs of research, development, testing and government review to ensure that the drugs are safe and effective. These costs, including research on many drugs that never get to market, exceed the manufacturing and distribution costs. Generic drug makers need not invest in the research because they can simply copy drugs not protected by patents and make the same profit while selling at a lower price. If not for the protection provided by patents, the drug companies might never have invested in the research for the AIDS drugs, and the drugs might not exist at any price.

Intellectual property rights, particularly patents and copyrights, seek a delicate balance. They provide an incentive for innovation, but limit the use of those innovations. There is, perhaps, a perfect balance, but we may never know what it is. Meanwhile, the debate over this balance has become more public, injecting more ideas and more confusion into the debate.

With properly balanced intellectual property protection, one should be rewarded commensurate with his contribution. Those who innovate should profit; those who merely copy should not.

It is the same with the IEEE Cleveland section and Cleveland "Contact." If you want to reap the benefits of this outstanding group and this excellent publication, you need to contribute. From my experience, the more active you are in IEEE, the more you will be rewarded. Decide today what you can contribute; then do it.

Michael is a patent attorney with Pearne & Gordon LLP in Cleveland.

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**The line is open twenty-
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