

UTD's Alan MacDiarmid Delivered the Texas Center for Superconductivity and Advanced Materials (TcSAM) Distinguished Lecture in the University of Houston (UH), October 17th, 2003

Da Hsuan Feng

Vice President for Research and Graduate Education and Professor of Physics
The University of Texas at Dallas (UTD)

Ever since Dr. Steven Pei, Associate Dean and Professor of Electrical Engineering and Deputy Director of (TcSAM) of the University of Houston learned that Alan MacDiarmid accepted the James Von Ehr Distinguished Professor of Science and Technology of UTD in the Fall of 1992, he instinctively understood that the expertise of Alan complements very well the research activities of TcSAM of UH. For this reason, he invited Alan to be a lecturer for TcSAM's distinguished lecture series.

The series of lectures began in 1989. The lecturers were the scientific greats of the late 20th century. One particularly interesting speaker was Paul Lauterbur in 1993. The title of Dr Lauterbur's talk was "Nuclear Magnetic Resonance: From Molecules to Microscopes to Minds". Note that in 1993, what is now known nowadays as "magnetic resonance imaging", or MRI, was still referred to by the pioneer as NMR. Also, as we all know now, in 2003, a few weeks ago, Lauterbur became the co-winner of the Nobel prize in medicine!

For about a year, Steven and Dr. Alex Ignatiev, the Director of TcSAM, and Brenda Holt, Administrative Assistant of TcSAM, and many members of UH, worked on and planned a very complicated logistics for the visit.

The hard worked by many people at UH paid off! The entire itinerary was perfectly and precisely executed. It included the following events:

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1. An elegant dinner reception in honor of Alan and his life partner Gayl Gentile with truly interesting discussions took place at La Mora restaurant. The participants included the current interim provost of UH, the Dean of Science, the Physics Department chair and the Vice President for Research. Discussion around the table included an in depth discussions about intellectual properties issues and challenges facing research universities. I was especially intrigued by the fact that the Physics Department chair is both an outstanding physicist (a high energy experimentalist) and also a attorney at law (with a JD from UH's law school).
2. A tour of TcSAM and other research facilities in UH the next morning. This included meeting and discussing with many outstanding researchers about their exciting research projects in the center. TcSAM is the result of merging of two international research centers in the University of Houston: Center for

Superconductivity of UH (TcSUH) and Center for Space Vacuum Epitaxy Center. These centers were founded in the mid eighties, after the legendary UH scientist Paul Chu (who is currently also the president of Hong Kong University of Science and Technology) and his colleagues discovered that a new form of materials can exhibit superconductivity at temperature never been observed (> 90 centigrade). Unquestionably, the research carried out in these centers, and now at TcSAM, places UH firmly as one of the centers of research in modern advanced materials. Of course, this center is a Texas resource.

3. The large scale luncheon with many Houston movers and shakers. I was quite surprised to see that over some 80 people attended this luncheon. It included the Dean of the School of Public Health of the University of Texas Houston Health Science Center, CEO of Center of Houston's Future, many UH Board members as well as the students and faculty leadership of the university.
4. The lecture by Alan, entitled "Electronic Polymers: New Materials for the 21st Century", is of course the highlight of the visit. This lecture of about an hour and a half (with over 15 minutes of intense questions and answers), was attended by some 350 enthusiastic people. This included not only students, faculty and administrators of UH, but representatives of some eight colleges as well as high schools. A large reception for the audience to meet with Alan followed immediately after the lecture was completed.

I hope that this visit of Alan to UH will unveil a era of collaborations between UTD and UH.