

What Is This Fourth Dimension?

Soon after we started publishing ASK, I heard from some of our NASA readers that we needed to feature more stories about managing research projects

THE RESEARCH COMMUNITY AT NASA, I WAS TOLD, IS TOO often overshadowed by the folks who build hardware. Four of NASA's nine centers, after all, are research centers.

I hope stories in several of our recent issues have satisfied some of those early critics. But to any project manager of a research project who may still feel slighted, well, here is an issue for you.

In working on this issue, what I've learned is that managing research projects demands an understanding of what Dr. Robert J. (Joe) Shaw calls the fourth dimension: politics. His story, "Getting Politically Active," explains how he has evolved from being an observer of organizational politics to actively politicking for his projects. Carol Ginty, who like Joe Shaw is located at NASA's John Glenn Research Center, knows that the technical report doesn't always sell the research. That's why she's always looking for things that will—and finds them wherever they turn up.

Tim Flores returns to *ASK* this issue. I interviewed Tim for Issue 2. At the time, he was on leave from NASA's Ames Research Center, working on a Masters degree at MIT. Finished now, he has a story, "Earthly Considerations on Mars," about the research he did for his thesis. Tim looked at two Mars projects, the successful Pathfinder and the ill-fated Surveyor, attempting to understand the difference between a successful mission and a failed one in terms of the organizational structures of the project teams. Research projects often give us many surprises, and this one is no exception.

Our interview this issue is with Dr. Michael Hecht, a project manager at the Jet Propulsion Laboratory. Among other things, Mike shares what it was like

working as the project manager and co-investigator on an instrument scheduled to fly on an upcoming Mars mission. Did his dual role on the project pose a conflict of interest? Read the interview and see.

In the Special Feature, APPL Knowledge Sharing Manager Denise Lee has a story about how the APPL Transfer Wisdom Workshops have evolved. Denise and her APPL teammates conduct one-day workshops at the NASA Centers, using stories from *ASK* to promote a knowledge sharing culture at each Center. Along with the story by Denise, we've included stories by participants from some of the workshops.

Lastly, we celebrate the life of Frank Hoban, who passed away unexpectedly in December. Frank was the editor of *Issues in Program and Project Management*, published by NASA and dedicated to research done by NASA managers. *Issues* appeared throughout the late 1980s and early 90s. "From The Director's Desk," Dr. Edward Hoffman's column, is a remembrance of Frank, and in the "Loop" we pass along some tributes written by Frank's friends and colleagues.

Hope you enjoy this issue of *ASK*. Remember, this and all issues are for you. •

