Briefings

edited by CONSTANCE HOLDEN

Emigré Enterprise

Most immigrant scientists from the former Soviet Union are lucky if they can get a job at least remotely related to their areas of expertise. But one such scientist, cryogenics expert and software engineer Alexander Narinsky, has figured out how to work the system and help colleagues in Russia at the same time.

Narinsky works as a computer programmer in Fairfax County, Virginia, but in his spare time, he has banded together with a fellow émigré, electrical engineer Alex Stone, to set up a company that will arrange for Russian scientists and engineers to be used "on the spot" to perform scientific and engineering projects, such as computer software programming jobs, for American companies. It's a win-win proposition, says Narinsky: U.S. firms can get jobs done for about a tenth of what it would cost to hire local professionals—and scientists in the new Commonwealth of Independent States, whose salaries may be worth no more than $20 a month, will get hard currency to help tide them over lean times.

The new group, International Scientific and Technology Communications, is as yet little more than a name and a fax number. But it has already come to a preliminary agreement with a small company in Springfield, Virginia, Sorites Group Inc., which designs software programs for economic forecasting. Sorites president John Sneed says the kind of work his firm does can be broken down into autonomous units that can be farmed out to "anyone with access to a PC." At the moment, he says, labor is expected to come from "a collection of free-lancers in Moscow"—in fact, he now has 60 résumés of Russians ready to go to work for him. And he says if things work out, the company may set up a Moscow office. Sneed points out that contractees could amass several thousand dollars a year each—enough to induce some top scientific talent to drop whatever they are doing for a little moonlighting. "Properly done, this could sustain the Russian scientific establishment in relatively grand style because of the wage disparity between East and West," he says.

Narinsky, who started his U.S. career working in a pizza parlor, and Stone, who launched his as a New York cab driver, are betting on it: They see no limit to their potential role as middlemen between Russia's starving scientific and technical community and lucrative markets in the West.

Stanford Responds To Sexism Charges

Gerald Silverberg, the Stanford neurosurgeon who was accused of sexism by his colleague, Frances Conley, has been removed from his position as acting chairman of neurosurgery.

Conley resigned from Stanford's neurosurgery department last July, after Silverberg was named acting department chair. She said the appointment reflected tacit approval of his sexist attitudes—which, she alleged, included his habit of calling women "honey"—as well as a general pattern of sexism at Stanford.

Silverberg

But Conley returned to Stanford last September after the university appointed a committee to look into her allegations. It was that committee's confidential report that prompted Stanford president Donald Kennedy and medical school dean David Korn to meet with Silverberg and ask him to step down. *Science* was unable to reach Silverberg, but last week he told reporters that he had seen the report, and that it mentioned "minor insensitivities" on his part, but contained nothing that would require disciplinary action. "I don't believe I have done anything wrong," he told *The San Francisco Chronicle*, "but I understand they [Korn and Kennedy] have an obligation to protect the university's good name." Neither Korn nor Kennedy would comment on the matter.

Wanted: Profs Who Will Teach

Another report decrying the imbalance between teaching and research in higher education may not seem particularly noteworthy—except this one is by some of the nation's hottest young researchers. Namely, 53 recipients of the National Science Foundation's (NSF) prestigious Presidential Young Investigator's (PYI) awards.

"The lack of support, indeed, occasional downright discouragement, of faculty achievements in teaching...is among the most pressing problems in higher education," say the former PYIs in "America's Academic Future," a report based on an NSF-sponsored meeting held last November in Washington. The group contends that academic tenure and promotion criteria need to be restructured to stress teaching as well as research. In addition, they recommend the endowment of more chairs for teaching excellence, more funding for instructional innovation, the development of a peer-based measure of teaching quality, and legislation that would spur industry to contribute technology and employees to education.

The PYIs also say the federal budget should put more emphasis on undergraduate education. One ironic step in that direction has taken place already: The PYI awards no longer exist, having been replaced by two new programs, one of which is the Presidential

Unraveling the Loblolly's Secrets

CHARLES TAUER

Breeding better trees has not been the sort of project guaranteed to win a scientist fast tenure. They take years to mature and decades may pass before the progeny of a cross can be evaluated. But Ron Sederoff and David O'Malley of North Carolina State University at Raleigh have now created a shortcut with a genetic map of the loblolly pine, a major source of wood pulp and paper products as well as timber that normally takes 12-15 years to mature. Using polymerase chain reaction techniques to amplify and analyze pine DNA, the researchers plotted about 200 markers on the tree's twelve pairs of chromosomes—in effect, the most extensive map ever made of a woody plant. Within a couple of years associations will emerge between the genetic markers and specific traits. By screening the DNA of seedlings, scientists will be able to know which trees they want to run with. "In the past, a lot of time and space were wasted on crosses and offspring that did not amount to much," says Sederoff. No longer.