SCIENCESCOPE

edited by JOSEPH PALCA

NIH's Aging Facilities Need Fresh Blood

NIH's clinical center—at 3 million square feet, the largest research hospital in the world—has turned 30, and not only has it outgrown its mechanical infrastructure, it has been diagnosed as facing systemic collapse. So, NIH officials are contemplating having to spend megabucks for a major facelift—or, worse, for a whole body replacement.

According to a recent engineering study by the Army Corps of Engineers, the clinical center risks imminent failure in its electrical, ventilation, and air conditioning systems because they were originally designed for a building one-third the size of today's mammoth structure. As a result, NIH now has two options: renovate, at an estimated cost of $1.2 billion over 17 years, or build a new building for $1.6 billion that could be ready in 12 years. NIH director Bernadine Healy told a House appropriations subcommittee earlier this month that she favors a replacement structure. But according to an NIH spokesman, a new building would necessitate a "major reconfiguration" of the NIH campus. "You're not just looking at a new hospital, but a change in the whole inner core of the campus."

So far, NIH doesn't have funding for either option. The subcommittee members seemed receptive to Healy's plea, but who will be sacrificed to sustain NIH?

SMITHSONIAN

Russian anthropologist rafts down Siberian river at turn of century.

Arctic Research Repeats History

Nearly 100 years after Franz Boas, widely considered the father of American anthropology, led an ambitious international attempt to study the environment and peoples of the North Pacific and Arctic, the Smithsonian Institution is helping to coordinate a second expedition that will follow in—and expand upon—Boas' footsteps.

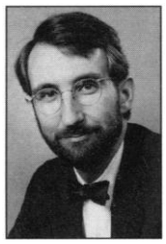
Boas' 1897 expedition was the first serious look at cultures on both sides of the Bering Strait and how they were related. Now, findings from the original expedition will provide a unique reference to examine how the dramatic changes in that area over the last century have transformed the diversity and integrity of the local peoples. In terms of cultural history, the region "is the one area in the world we know least about," says William Fitzhugh, director of the Arctic Studies Center at the Smithsonian.

The new research program will draw upon anthropologists, linguists, and archeologists from around the world, with a large contingent of Russians. Among the issues to be examined: the survival of native languages and folklore, the continuity of the indigenous genetic pool, and changes in the social, political, and economic structures of the area's communities. To make this flurry of Arctic research available to the public, the Smithsonian may even open an office in Alaska, says Fitzhugh.

CDC Seeks a Sex Policy

A top Bush Administration official calling for a sex survey? Sounds impossible, but Centers for Disease Control director William L. Roper may be getting close. Roper wants to start a dialogue with the scientific community that will culminate in a "balanced and coherent public policy" relating to sexuality among young people. And before you can build a policy, Roper knows, you need information. "It's clear to me if we're going to change the behavior of America's young people," Roper told *Science* last week, "we need to know more than we currently do about that behavior."

Will this put Roper out on a political limb? "I don't want to get drawn into controversy on the particular survey," he hastily adds, referring to the two sexual behavior surveys vetoed by his boss, Secretary of Health and Human Services Louis Sullivan. But Roper does say that from a public health standpoint there are plenty of reasons to discourage youth from engaging in sexual activity prematurely: It lowers their risk of sexually transmitted disease, including HIV, and for women it reduces the risk of cervical cancer. Add in reduced numbers of teen pregnancies and low birth weight infants, and increased high school graduation rates, and the argument for an agenda for slowing the onset of sexual activity becomes compelling, in Roper's view. He's begun presenting his ideas to meetings of public health officials and hopes eventually to organize a campaign similar to the one the Surgeon General waged against the tobacco industry in the 1960s. With last week's boost from Congress (see p. 172), Roper may soon get the information about teen sexual behavior that he needs.



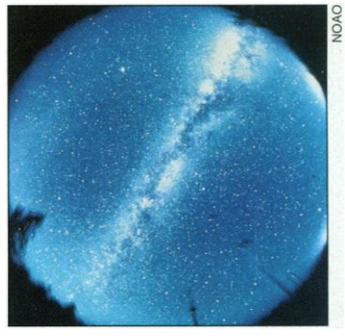
William L. Roper

Trade a Telescope for Tortellini?

On again, off again, and now it may be on again in San Diego where the city fathers have blinked at their 1984 decision to use only low-pressure sodium streetlamps in order to ensure Palomar Observatory astronomers (and those at the city's smaller optical telescopes) celestial views.

The scientists had argued, back in the early '80s, that light pollution was partially blinding them, and that if the city installed high-pressure streetlamps—lights that shine over a broader band—they would increase light pollution by 30%. It might become extremely difficult, the scientists said, to see faint objects.

The argument worked then, but now, 8 enlightening years later, city councilman John Hartley has had a bright idea: He wants to light up San Diego to white out crime. Says Hartley, the yellowish low-pressured lights do not provide the same security as high-pressured lights, which emit a whiter glow. But San Diego's police department disputes that claim and other city officials say that the low-pressured lamps save money because they are more efficient. Moreover, it could cost $8 million to switch over.



OVON

Light glare blurs Milky Way.

Still, Hartley might have enough support on the city council to reverse the 1984 decision when the issue comes to a vote on 27 April. Then what of Palomar? One of Hartley's aides—obviously more of an epicure than a scientist— recently suggested to the local press that with its mountaintop location, the observatory would make an ideal site for a romantic restaurant. Too bad the name "Stars" is already taken.