

Edison group celebrates 100 years of light bulbs

By KATIE KERWIN

What do the dimming of lights at the Super Bowl, a San Francisco symposium of scientists, professors and industrialists and a science field day for a Hawaiian grade school have in common?

They are all part of the International Centennial of Light — a celebration of the 100th anniversary of the invention of the light bulb. The center for planning these and hundreds of other centennial programs is the Thomas Alva Edison Foundation in Southfield at 18280 W. Ten Mile in Suite 143 of the Cambridge Office Plaza.

President of the foundation is James G. Cook of Birmingham.

The foundation, funded by 220 companies worldwide, acts as a middleman between business and education, Cook said. Involved for 33 years in promoting the image of science and technology, the organization is honoring Edison, the man behind the bulb. General Motors research scientist Charles Kettering set up the foundation in 1946, with the help of Henry Ford, Harvey Firestone and other prominent industrialists of the day.

Frustrated with the expectations and education of young scientists entering

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— James G. Cook, of Birmingham

industry, Kettering was looking for a way to improve science education, Cook said.

"The money and expertise of industry could be used, without educators feeling that they were being dictated to," Cook explained.

The foundation was to foster a cooperative, mutually beneficial relationship between industry and education. Its purpose was to encourage young people to pursue careers in science and engineering and to increase public appreciation and understanding of modern technology.

Edison's name was chosen for the foundation to represent science's contributions to the quality of life.

"Edison symbolized all that is good in technology," Cook said. "He never invented anything unless he could see a use for it."

THE EDISON Foundation runs about

five major conferences annually for science teachers.

"We want to improve the technical competency of teachers and to re-stimulate them," Cook said.

Edison Science and Engineering Youth Day is held in more than 200 school districts each year. School programs are sponsored by one or several local industries.

"The idea is getting students and teachers into industry to see science in industry firsthand — to see what it's all about," Cook explained.

Contact with scientists gives students a sense of what science is like in the working world, he said.

"If the kids and teachers can work with a scientist, they'll find out he's human, too, and he's just as concerned about the environment and the energy crisis as they are."

The foundation also encourages sci-

entists into the classroom. A specialist can teach a class session on a new technological development unfamiliar to the general science teacher.

ORGANIZING national colloquiums on topics of current scientific interest is another of the foundation's specialties.

"We're averaging two Nobel Prize winners per program," he said.

The same service helps local groups planning foundation-organized programs.

"With our help, they're getting speakers they wouldn't have a ghost of a chance of getting if they invited them on their own."

Printing and distributing a half-million science booklets annually is part of the foundation's campaign to introduce youngsters to science painlessly. The free booklets explain how to build simple circuits, leading into more complicated directions for constructing telegraph sets and Geiger counters.

"We teach them to make a little burglar alarm they can put on their dresser drawer so it will go off when their mother opens it to put their socks in," Cook said with a smile. More complex projects show how to make a cloud

chamber or electroplate metal.

"It's all aimed at getting kids hooked on the fun of science," he explained. "We print 100,000 of each type and sell them to corporations at cost, with the provision that they must give them away."

The return on the company's investment in a conference, booklet or school program is good will from the community, Cook said. The foundation normally runs programs in 48 states and 33 countries on an annual budget of \$350,000.

"WE'RE A CATALYST. Our job is to convince corporations that these programs are worthwhile."

The foundation first seeks out science teachers in the area for which a conference is planned. After finding out their major areas of concern, the foundation works with sponsoring companies to plan appropriate events and schedule speakers.

"We keep a low profile," Cook said. If a project is successful, most of the credit will go to the sponsoring firms. It's that public appreciation that keeps companies interested in funding Edison Foundation projects, he said.

The International Centennial of Light has greatly increased the year's schedule of events. The foundation's budget is up to \$3 million with centennial projects this year.



The Thomas Alva Edison Foundation is celebrating the 100th anniversary of the invention of the light bulb and honoring Edison, the man behind the light.

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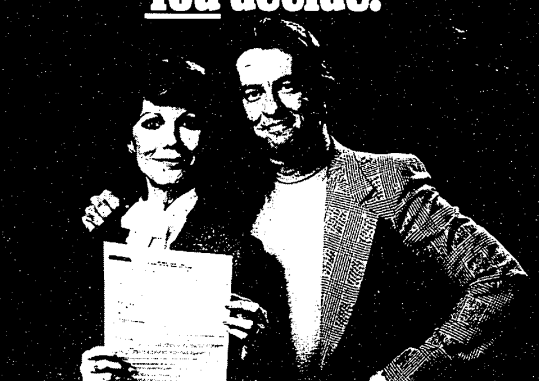

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