

Self-taught scientist wins over critics

By KATHLEEN MORAN

Stanford Ovshinsky may be about to realize the impossible dream.

The self-taught scientist, whose discoveries have stirred controversy in the scientific community, believes he has found an affordable way of converting sunlight into electricity. His research is of great import.

"If we don't solve the energy problem, obviously there is going to be increased unemployment and, certainly, inflation and — unfortunately and tragically — probably war," he said.

An inventor with little formal schooling beyond high school, Ovshinsky managed to stun the scientific community 12 years ago with his discovery of a new type of transistor which he said was more versatile and less costly than traditional crystalline transistors.

The scientific community, which was literally littered with Ph.D.'s swept him aside as being a glib con man.

But over the years, Ovshinsky's discoveries have been born out and gradually have gained acceptance and recognition. His research in amorphorous ma-

terials has led to the development of, among other things, silver-less film and computer memory elements which don't need a constant flow of energy to retain their memory properties.

After a somewhat tumultuous career, he now stands on the verge of announcing practical applications for his discoveries. And his research into solar energy recently won considerable recognition when the Atlantic Richfield Co. (ARCO) announced that it was committed to Ovshinsky on the right track. ARCO is pumping \$30 million into his research.

"I think it was the size of it (which brought on all the publicity)," said Ovshinsky, 60.

"Even in this day and age, even \$30 million is a lot of money and an indication of the sort of depth and potential they think it has."

OVSHINSKY READILY admits he isn't from the typical scientist's mold, but then neither is his research nor his lifestyle. He lists art, music and literature as his major outside interests and says he has no hobbies beyond "thinking and reading."

From his office in the unassuming Energy Conversion Devices building on Maple Road in Troy, Ovshinsky talked about his career and admitted it was encouragement from friends and colleagues that pulled him through the tough times. "I must say it has been very frustrating at times," he said. "There were times when I became very discouraged, but many people believed in us. It's just the sort of thing you have to go through."

He harbors no malice toward his critics and notes quietly that it is not unusual for a new idea to take 20 years or more before gaining acceptance.

It's been exactly that long since he and his wife, Iris, who holds the traditional college degrees, started their business in Troy.

At that time, they couldn't raise an eyebrow with talk of finding alternate sources of energy. "Nobody was interested in energy at that time," he recalls. "But change is very slow in society except under times of crisis. Now, with the crisis, there is interest in finding alternate forms of energy."

Last year, when 600 scientists gath-

ered in Europe to discuss amorphorous materials, it was Ovshinsky, the self-taught inventor, who was recognized as the pioneer in the field. He beams with pride when he notes that the research which has taken off from his discoveries and now fills several volumes led to the awarding of Noble prizes in physics to three scientists.

It's not that the Ovshinskys ever doubted that they were on the right path, but the financial worries of keeping their small business going had its moments. They sold stock and formed alliances with businesses which hoped to benefit from their research. Some, like Sharp Corp. and Fuji film in Japan, are now licensed to produce and market Ovshinsky's products.

And it was, in part, a feeling of responsibility that urged them on, noted Ovshinsky. "I would say we are in it for two things. The first, of course, is the feeling we got out of it and the expression for us. And it's a responsibility we have. We do have stock holders and we have a responsibility to the people who believed in us to be successful so that they can profit."



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— Stanford Ovshinsky inventor

ALTHOUGH HE didn't follow the traditional path of education, Ovshinsky doesn't downplay its importance. He takes pride in the fact that Lawrence Institute of Technology awarded him an honorary degree last weekend. "You can't go without an education, you must educate yourself," he said.

"It's just a matter of how you do it, whether you can do it on your own or not." He backs up those words with constant contact with students. Despite his busy schedule, Ovshinsky takes time to speak to high school, and even elementary, youths.

from our readers

Farms needed

Editor: Many people are confused about the proposed tax plans in Lansing, the least of which is your writer Tim Richard, as evidenced by his remarks in the May 29 edition ("The farmer has hooks in Smith-Bullard plan").

As an ex-farmer, I must take exception to his views — "nastily fishhook" — about exempting farms from the proposed Smith-Bullard legislation. To say that the farmer never judges ideas by their overall impact on society but only by their effect on the farmer, borders on slander. But then, who does look out

for the interests of the farmer, other than the farmer?

To advocate placing of another land tax on farm property — usually their only significant asset — at a time when farmers are going broke in record numbers is absurd. Productive farmers are needed, especially with today's food prices.

Yes, farms are businesses, but to compare them to manufacturing is to display a basic ignorance of the financial statements of both and their respective rates of return on investment.

I say nuts to your attitude and the Smith-Bullard Plan.
EDWARD R. BURGER,
Lathrup Village

Dedication is planned

The new site of the Bushnell Congregational Church will be dedicated at 11 a.m. Sunday, June 15. It is located at Meadowbrook and Broquet in Novi.

Presiding at the ceremonies will be Bushnell's pastor, Dr. Robert Crawford. A reception will follow in the clubhouse of the Country Place con-

dominium adjacent to the site. Another church services will be held at 10 a.m. at the present location, Southfield and Grand River, Detroit. It will be followed by a buffet luncheon after which the congregation will proceed to Novi for the dedication ceremonies.

Presbyterians elect Hills resident to post

Donn Denniston, 33745 Hunters Pointe, Farmington Hills, has been elected to the assembly committee on congregational mission, in the highest policy-making body of the 2.5 million

member United Presbyterian Church. The committee considers and makes recommendations on the mission conducted by local churches.

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