

Gerry comes to Stony Brook

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In the early sixties the Stony Brook Physics Department decided to initiate a program in nuclear structure physics even though there were no nuclear structure physicists in the department. It is hard to find the motivation for this but I believe it was an effort to do something “big” which could be achieved with the money coming into the State University system. An electrostatic accelerator could be purchased and people could be found to use it.

In that context I came to Stony Brook in 1965 to establish the Nuclear Structure Laboratory. A tandem Van de Graaff was ordered, a building designed, and we were off. I was fortunate in being able to convince a remarkable group of young experimenters [among them the previous speaker] to join me and we have prospered.. However, to have a quality program we needed a theory group of comparable [or better] quality.

Soon after my arrival Stony Brook astounded the community with the announcement that C.N. [Frank] Yang was coming to head an Institute of Theoretical Physics. Shortly after his arrival in early 1966 I had lunch with Frank and asked for help in establishing Nuclear Theory at Stony Brook. Frank’s immediate response was “Who is the best nuclear theorist in the world?” Now that is a very short list and Gerry was certainly on it. He quickly rose to the top. I had known Gerry from Minnesota and Argonne and Frank knew Gerry from Princeton. We agreed he was the best for Stony Brook. As Gerry has said, he went for “a walk in the woods” with Frank and discussed a possible move to join his Institute and establish a Nuclear Theory Group.

Gerry and Traudl visited on a beautiful Spring weekend, enhanced by the presence here of their friends, Gunner Kallen and his wife, giving a good first impression in spite of the “construction site” Gerry has referred to. That initiated negotiations, mostly informal, as Gerry returned to Nordita [on leave from Princeton] “before thinking more about future plans”.

There followed a correspondence between Yang and Gerry which included a tentative offer of a Professorship in ITP and other considerations which were important to Gerry. One significant source of confusion occurred when

Yang's letter containing the offer inadvertently went by surface mail, taking about six weeks to reach Gerry. Meanwhile Frank persisted although Gerry, partly out of concern about what he called "the Viet Nam business", was reluctant to give up his foothold at Nordita. Gerry proposed an arrangement in which he would establish a group at Stony Brook while alternating his presence between Copenhagen and Long Island. This would not have been possible at Princeton but Frank and John Toll quickly agreed and an offer was sent to Gerry [this time by air] .

Gerry indicated he would probably accept but delayed his reply until the Nordita Board approved the arrangement. On receiving approval in late April 1967, Gerry accepted the offer to come to Stony Brook starting in the fall of 1968 asking us to postpone any announcement until after he had returned to Princeton in the fall of 1967. Along with Gerry, in the fall of 1968 Tom Kuo and Andy Jackson came as tenure track faculty and Akito Arima joined the group as a Professor. Thus the start of the Nuclear Theory Group which continues to evolve and excel. The opportunity to establish this "Institute" was surely the dominant factor in Gerry's decision to come to Stony Brook.

Finally, the collaboration between the theory and experimental groups has been exceptional, to the benefit of both, especially the students. We all must thank Gerry, Frank, and all of you who have participated, for making Nuclear Physics at Stony Brook 45 years of excitement, with more in the future.