



Nonprofit World

SUSTAINABLE GOAL. Trained in the United States, Rikin Gandhi went to India in 2006 intending to help Indian farmers produce biofuels for their energy needs. But when he saw farmers struggling under crushing poverty, he decided a better use of his computer science degree would be to popularize efficient farming practices such as composting. So Gandhi (center, with camera) joined Microsoft Research India to start a project, called Digital Green, that has spread such practices by distributing demo DVDs to a dozen villages in southern and eastern India.

Within the next 3 months, Digital Green will leave the fold and become an independent nonprofit organization. Gandhi's goal is to reach 3000 villages with farming techniques that can help villagers out of poverty. "He's putting the pieces together in such a way that the direction [of the project] is not compromised, while still getting the best advice he can get," says Kentaro Toyama, who leads the Microsoft Research office in Bangalore, India.

MONEY MATTERS

CHARITABLE SCIENCE. Two former college roommates have developed a new scheme to raise and distribute money for research: Ask the public to invest in their favorite projects.

David Vitrant (below), 30, a graduate student in genetics at the University of Pittsburgh in Pennsylvania, and Mark Friedgan (bottom), 29, an entrepreneur in Chicago, launched Fund Science (www.fundscience.org) this fall.



Their goal is to raise almost \$1.5 million in the first 3 years and offer 25 grants. Donors can scroll through "public abstracts" from submitted applications, after they've been vetted by the company's board, to determine where they'd like their dollars to go.



The target recipients are young scientists. "Even if these people have ideas and they have the drive, they have no funding," says Friedgan, adding that he has been struck by how much easier it has been for him to get his business ideas funded. Even though tax dollars already support scientific research, Friedgan predicts that the public will be keen to back more—because this time, "they're going to be passionate about it." Vitrant plans to devote himself full-time to Fund Science after finishing his Ph.D.

MILESTONES

GRANDPA'S TELESCOPE.

Commissioned by astronomer George Ellery Hale, this 60-inch telescope atop Mount Wilson, California, saw first light on 13 December 1908. Hale's grandsons Sam (left) and Brack (right) peered through the instrument during a centennial celebration last month. The telescope remained the world's largest until 1917, when the 100-inch Hooker Telescope was unveiled.



THEY SAID IT

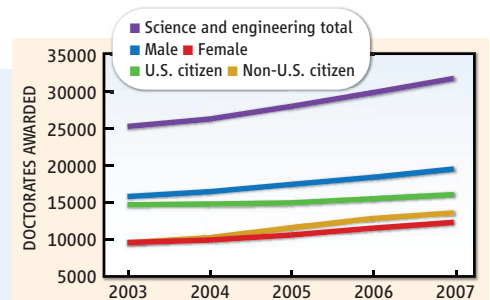
"That's an awful lot of people being pulled aside and inconvenienced. I think it's a sham. We have no evidence it works."

—Carnegie Mellon University statistician Stephen Fienberg on the U.S. Transportation Security Administration's behavioral screening program, whose primary aim is to spot suspected terrorists at airports based on suspicious behavior. Fienberg has studied the 2-year-old program and other counterterrorism efforts.

Data Point >>>

CAMPUS THROG. Those who worry that the United States isn't producing enough Ph.D.s in science and engineering can take heart from the latest *Survey of Earned Doctorates* by the U.S. National Science Foundation. U.S. institutions granted a record 31,801 science and engineering doctorates in 2007, a 6.5% increase over 2006. The increase continues a steady, upward trend that began in 2003. Although driven by more non-U.S. citizens earning science and engineering doctorates (up 6%), the trend includes more U.S. citizens (up 3.6%), too.

The continuing increase in the number of foreign students earning Ph.D.s shows that "fears about the U.S. slipping as a destination for academic talent were overblown," says Daryl Chubin, director of the AAAS Center for Advancing Science & Engineering Capacity. But he cautions that rising numbers of women and minorities receiving doctorates aren't translating into a more diverse science and engineering faculty. "The achievement of the Ph.D. credential is not the end game," he says.



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