Opportunities, Decisions Await Oddone

by Kurt Riesselmann

Pier Oddone, deputy director at Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory, will assume the leadership of the largest US particle physics laboratory at a time of great scientific opportunity and important decisions.

He's smart. He's charming. He's competitive.

Since his years in elementary school in Peru, Pier Oddone has aimed to be among the best. From studying at MIT and Princeton to inventing a novel particle collider to managing multi-million-dollar budgets, Oddone has consistently excelled. Beginning July 1, Oddone will focus his leadership and management skills on the Department of Energy's Fermi National Accelerator Laboratory, becoming the fifth director in the laboratory's 38-year history.

"It's a huge job," he admitted upon the announcement of his appointment. "You'll never get bored. You have to create an exciting environment where science flourishes. At the same time you have to run projects on time, budget and schedule. You have to be safe. You have to have impeccable operations. You have to work with the community to get local support. You have to work with the state and many parts of the federal government. It's a humbling thing."

Oddone, 60, will succeed Michael Witherell, who has served as Fermilab director since 1999. With the approval of the Secretary of Energy, Oddone was selected by Universities Research Association, which manages Fermilab, on the advice of a 19-member search committee led by former presidential science advisor Neal Lane.

"Pier Oddone is an excellent choice to be the next director," said Witherell, who announced in October 2003 that he would step down from his post in June 2005. "His experience as a particle physicist, division head, and deputy director at Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory has prepared him well to lead Fermilab. He has been an effective advocate and overseer for a portfolio of research that includes such diverse areas as scientific computing, genomics, and cosmology, in addition to particle physics."

Raymond L. Orbach, director of the federal Department of Energy's Office of Science, calls Oddone superbly qualified to guide Fermilab into the future.

"We are very fortunate that Pier Oddone will become the next director of Fermilab," Orbach said. "He is an outstanding scientist and a proven leader and manager whose appointment serves Fermilab, the Office of Science and the nation well."

Oddone, who has worked at Berkeley Lab for 32 years, joins Fermilab at a time of great opportunity and important decisions. In 2004, Fermilab's Tevatron, the world's highest-energy particle collider, churned out more collisions than ever before, greatly increasing the potential for discovery. Its Main Injector has begun to deliver beam to the MINOS neutrino experiment; plans for the BTeV experiment to study bottom quarks are well under way; and the Particle Astrophysics Center at the lab pursues projects dedicated to solving the mystery of dark matter and dark energy.

But the laboratory is at a crossroads. The Large Hadron Collider at CERN in Switzerland will soon take over as the world's most powerful accelerator. The global particle physics community is developing plans for an International Linear Collider, and Fermilab is among potential sites for the multi-billion-dollar machine. If, when and where the ILC gets built will greatly influence Fermilab's future.

"We are living in a time of remarkable opportunity for particle physics," said Oddone. "The next few years will bring a revolution in our understanding of the universe. As one of the world's great physics laboratories, Fermilab will make vital contributions to the discoveries ahead."

Named new director of Fermilab, Pier Oddone addressed Fermilab employees on November 19, 2004.

Photos: Deborah Guzman Meyer (top left) and Reidar Hahn, Fermilab