

Rotary Club International

September 24, 2008, Invited Speaker

Year of Planet Earth: the Next Sputnik

By Ralph W. Baird

CEO, Baird Petrophysical International, Houston, Texas

Member, Board of Officers, International Year of Planet Earth 2007-2009

It has happened before, many times. The Earth is on front stage again; on TV; in our minds; in our future. It was 50 years ago when we last got serious about science and math and encouraged our youth to work hard and to compete. The motivation was the International Geophysical Year 1957-58, or to some, the IGY. It was October 4, 1957 when the Russians successfully launched Sputnik and President Eisenhower was elated and congratulated Premier Khrushchev on such a scientific accomplishment. Then what happened? A good thing became the object of pessimism and fear of the unknown. The reporters changed the story from excitement and success to fear and hate. The result, though, was innovation and a new breed of youth to become science superstars. So, where is the next Sputnik?

The next Sputnik is right under our noses. It is here in Houston. More sources of energy are needed, not in the US, but in the developing world. The competition for these new sources is new and there is a solution.

2007-2009 is called the International Year of Planet Earth, Earth sciences for Society. This initiative commemorates the 50th anniversary of the International Geophysical Year and has successfully attracted collaboration from 70 countries, including the US and is growing. In October 2008, here in Houston, there will be a first ever Joint Meeting of the Geological Society of America (GSA) and the Gulf Coast Association of Geological Societies (GCAGS). These 14,000 practitioners and academics will share information and network in celebration of the International Year of Planet Earth (IYPE). There are ten (10) themes to IYPE and to the Joint Meeting. These 10 themes relate to Earth processes and sustainability through adaptation.

Houston, so far, remains the center of innovation for new energy extraction technology. To remain on top will take municipal planning and acknowledgement of Houston's role in leading the US and the world in energy transformation. The new petroleum sources are here in the US and are available today from developing and developed countries at competitive valuations. New sources are also needed from known non-petroleum sources. Innovation and competition will bring these additional sources to the anxious consumer here in the US and in developing countries.

Facts and solutions are needed and advice by Earth scientists and physicists is now important to our political leaders and planners. It is time now to explore and discover the facts and solutions.