



Who invented the laser?

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Lucent Threw a Party And Everybody Came

Someone suggested to Gerry Butters, CEO of Lucent Technologies Optical Networking Business Unit, that Lucent should celebrate the 40th anniversary of the invention of the laser. He agreed and the celebration was held May 4, 1998, in conjunction with the Conference on Lasers and Electro-Optics (CLEO) in San Francisco.



Robert Russell (sitting left) and Boris Stoicheff (standing right) join Arthur Schawlow, standing left, and Frances and Charles Townes at the Lucent celebration.

A reception was held, open to all conference attendees, in honor of a number of Bell Labs luminaries in the field, including the two Nobel laureates that started it all, Arthur L. Schawlow and Charles H. Townes, who received the first laser patent for work at Bell Labs. Several hundred scientists from around the world joined the festivities.

Wayne Knox, head of the Bell Labs Advanced Photonics Research Department and master of ceremonies, noted that he was about a half year old when the laser was invented. He welcomed everyone to the celebration, and thanked the people who put the celebration together -- Bell Labs researchers Herwig Kogelnik, Ting Li, Jim Gordon, Jack Tomlinson, and Gary Boyd.



Wayne Knox of Bell Labs presents a 40th anniversary cake to Arthur L. Schawlow, left, and Charles H. Townes.

He then mentioned the researchers who were receiving awards at the CLEO conference for work done at Bell Labs.

- Federico Capasso, Jerome Faist, Rudolf Kazarinov, Robert Suris - Rank Prize, for contributions to the quantum-cascade laser
- Rudy Kazarinov - IEEE LEOS Quantum Electronics Award
- Arthur Ashkin - Frederick Ives Medal/Jarvus W. Quinn Endowment, for the invention of optical tweezers
- David Williams - Edgr D. Tillyer Award
- Keichi Iga - John Tyndal Award
- Amnon Yariv - Esther Hoffman Beller Award
- Benjamin Eggleton - Adolph Lomb Medal

Then the microphone was given over to several researchers who reminisced about the hectic, early days of laser research after Schawlow and Townes published their seminal paper, *Infrared and Optical Masers* .

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Speakers in this Section

- [Dr. Amnon Yariv, Caltech](#)
- [Elsa Garmire, Dartmouth College](#)
- [Alastair Glass, Bell Labs](#)
- [Herwig Kogelnik, Bell Labs](#)
- [Dr. Hermann Haus, MIT](#)
- [Arthur Schawlow](#)
- [Charles Townes](#)