LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

Promising the Future…with Caution

When I dipt into the future far as human eye could see;/Saw the vision of the world, and all the wonder that would be.

— Alfred Lord Tennyson

While science and technology will no doubt improve the way we live in decades to come, the future can also have a warning label. That's the theme of this issue's Hard Copy essay by Freeman Dyson, futurist and professor emeritus at the Institute for Advanced Study. His essay highlights both the promise of genetic engineering and the profound challenges of managing technology that could allow us to direct the evolution of life on earth.

The capabilities that Professor Dyson foresees are still quite distant, if they can be achieved at all. However, his main points about science and society resonate strongly for everyone at NJIT engaged in bringing about more immediate change. The articles in this issue sample the excitement and positive view of the future that typify research and learning throughout our university. The cover story focuses on pioneering work that a young researcher, Treena Livingston Arinzeh, is doing with adult stem cells, work that has far-reaching medical potential. Other stories describe a commercially significant advance involving microelectromechanical systems (MEMS) and a breakthrough in chemistry that could provide environmentally friendly solvents essential for many industries.

In varying degrees, all of the efforts featured have social implications. Although Assistant Professor Arinzeh's research is less controversial because it involves the healing possibilities of adult stem cells rather than embryonic cells, virtually every initiative in the biomedical field poses ethical questions that must be resolved outside of the laboratory. Similarly, the value of innovations such as those resulting from research in chemistry must be weighed in light of environmental and economic considerations that can be global in scale.

The capacity for balanced evaluation of social change is as vital as the professional skills needed to foster that change. The article by Stephen Seidman, dean of the College of Computing Sciences, and the interview with Fadi Deek, acting dean of the College of Science and Liberal Arts, reflect this aspect of NJIT's mission as a comprehensive, technological research university. The promise of a future made better than the present through science and technology is implicit in all that we seek to accomplish at NJIT. We're equally committed to encouraging thoughtful analysis of the social cautions attached to scientific and technological advances, helping to ensure that they will be applied in ways that continue to make the future a desirable destination. ■