



FENGs' WAY

Brothers devise a two-wheel cure for the common meeting

By **STEVE WOODWARD**
THE OREGONIAN

Staff meetings were never designed to be productive. Hogs dominate discussions. The bored stifle yawns. The ambitious engage in one-upmanship. Time seems to screech to a crawl in a swivel-chair purgatory.

You might as well be off riding your bicycle.

That's the mantra of the bicycling Feng brothers.

Every week, the two computer scientists at the OGI School of Science and Engineering in Hillsboro lead staffers on an unusual 20-mile-plus jaunt through the rolling Washington County hills while they discuss everything from projects to performance reviews.

"You can't fall asleep at the meetings," says Wu-chang Feng, who, with his brother Wu-chi Feng, is a researcher at the school.

No lie. Chatter about workaday issues is broken by dire warnings:

Car left!

Truck coming!

Railroad tracks!

The Fengs count themselves among the growing contingent of technology workers who play while they work.

For example, at Intel, which sponsors some of OGI's research, one group leaves work at 5 p.m. every Wednesday for a three-hour hike. The hike gives employees time with managers and enables a variety of people to meet face to face for the first time.

An Intel engineering team plays competitive foosball in the cafeteria. Foosball is such a big part of their creative process that they have to maintain a budget for table upkeep.

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JONATHAN WALPOLE
DIRECTOR OF THE SYSTEMS SOFTWARE LABORATORY

There's even an Intel Motorcycle Club.

But not many are literally taking the concept of staff meetings to the streets.

"When you come here," says graduate student Antoine Luu, "you will bike."



One recent Wednesday, the brothers led a group of 10 cyclists on a 21-mile-long meeting trip between farm fields and roadside trees.

But they didn't chat about the scenery.

As the motley-colored band of riders huffed and puffed their way along West Union, Helvetia, Jackson Quarry and other back roads, they chewed on esoterica such as XML, metadata, salinity files and a broken Counter-Strike server.

The Feng brothers got into a discussion about one of their lab's research areas: multiplayer, online games.

"Hey, are you interested in any of our real virtual reality-type gaming, like multiplayer games?" 35-year-old Wu-chi asked.

"Sugih Jamin's interested in multiplayer games," 33-year-old Wu-chang answered.

"No, no, no, like . . ."

"Like an augmented reality game?"

"I talked to Tamara yesterday."

"She interested in that?"

"So she's talking about doing all this stuff about coordinated reasoning. Right turn!" The Feng brothers have

been leading their graduate students, interns and other faculty on bike rides for the past two years. They are often joined by Jonathan Walpole, director of the Systems Software Laboratory, where they all work on big computing issues involving networks, mobile computing and operating systems.

"On the road, you're unconstrained in your thinking," says Wu-chi, an associate professor.

Not that the average person would be able to figure out what they were thinking. The Feng brothers focus on the highly complex nuances of such things as video sensors, computer security and computer forensics.

The brothers come from a remarkable family of five scientists. Their oldest brother, Wu-chun Feng, is a computer scientist at Los Alamos National Laboratory in New Mexico. Another brother, Wu-che Feng, is a satellite engineer for Boeing Co. in Los Angeles. Their father, Tse-yun Feng, recently retired as a computer science professor at Pennsylvania State University, having spent several years on leave at the National Science Foundation.

Walpole recruited Wu-chi and Wu-chang in 2000. Wu-chi from Ohio State University, Wu-chang from a San Francisco dot-com. They arrived at OGI the following year.

"The opportunity to work with your brother is unique," says Wu-chang, an assistant professor.

The Fengs' cycling passion was a perfect fit for Walpole, who in 1998 had won the Oregon Bicycle Racing Association's Best All-Around Rider Competition. Walpole has ridden more than 200,000 miles since age 15, competing in more than 1,000 amateur and pro-am events.

"It probably seems like an unconventional way of organizing a group," Walpole says of the informal nature of the Systems Software Lab, which Walpole founded in 1989.

"In research, you have to be creative," he says. "You can't force a person to create. . . . You have to have people be enthusiastic at work, as though it's a hobby."

Like many engineering teams in high technology, Walpole and the Fengs find other ways for the staff to bond.

They lunch together. They barbecue together. They play video games together after hours.

They even get their hair cut together.

Wu-chang's girlfriend, a hairstylist, is the official barber for the Systems Software Lab, which is abbreviated SysL and pronounced "sizzle."

"Every time we go to a department meeting," Wu-chang says, "you can tell the SysL people, because their hair's styled."

As for the bike rides, word is spreading around the school. Wu-chi says more and more OGI scientists are signing up for them.

Wu-chi says the more the merrier. "This," he says, "will just become a think tank on wheels."

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Steve Woodward: 503-294-5134;
stevewoodward@news.oregonian.com