Towns and family go to Sweden

By Jeff Talmarce

Just how does one react to the news that you have been awarded the Nobel prize? Professor Charles H. Townes, Provost of MIT, inventor of the maser, and now Nobel laureate, was awar ded at 4:30 a.m. Thursday, Octo ber 29, by a local radio station and asked this question. From that time on the phone never stopped ringing; Professor Townes recounts.

The official notifications of the award did not reach Townes un til that Thursday afternoon when he was finally able to reach his wife and find that she had the official cable. Later that same afternoon the Swedish ambassador made a call, Townes arrived back in Boston Saturday, October 31, and was met by contingents of his family students and friends with signs proclaiming "Scien tists and Engineers for Townes" and "Congratulations Dr. Townes." He even got to kiss the baby of one of the laboratory tech nicians. "Tover felt more like a politician," he remembers.

Also greeting him were handfuls of congratulatory telegrams and letters. One, from the American Physical Society, read congratula tions to the next President. An other from the two other winners who will share the prize, with Townes, Dr. Basov and Prokrov, congratulated him. Townes and the two Russian physicists are good friends; Basov and Prokrov visited with the Townes family in 1961.

How about encouraging another Nobel winner? To this, Towne s spoke of encouraging the indi vidual scientist in their research but noted the importance of stu dent work with scientists as re search, he feels, is an important part of the teaching process. The importance of adequate equip ment and what the Committee on Educational Policy called an aca demic atmosphere.

Does Dr. Townes expect his statue to appear on the pedestals in Building 7 supposedly reserved for MIT winners? "I wasn't aware of the rumor," he said, "but I suppose those are for pe ople who've died, and I don't ex pect to be there just yet." The future for Dr. Towne's work will be divided between administrative work as Provost and some research. He's very interest ed in the effects of light inter acting with atomic materials. Work on the precise measurement of distance, relativistic effects, and the astrophysics of space are also interesting. The third area, one with which he is interested is in high-resolution spectroscopy using maser devices. He is not expect ing to spend time developing a maser-laser "death ray."

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Honored by associates

Nobel award to Townes

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