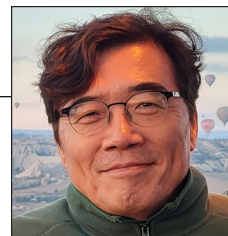




JOEL PANEK,
Fundamental
Research Committee



HAK LAE LEE,
Editor, *Journal
of Korea TAPPI*

Carrying forward the tradition of fundamental research

Since its first symposium in 1957, the Fundamental Research Symposium has evolved around fundamental research themes aimed at scientifically understanding papermaking. The symposium is organized by the Fundamental Research Committee (FRC), which is operated by the Fundamental Research Society (FRS). The unique format of the symposium, held at universities such as Oxford and Cambridge where participants stay together, fosters intensive academic exchange and collegial interaction.

The *Journal of Korea TAPPI* (*J. Korea TAPPI*) recently met with Joel Panek, Ph.D., chair of the FRC and research scientist at Smurfit WestRock, to explore the history, significance, and future direction of the Fundamental Research Symposium, which is widely regarded as one of the most prestigious academic events in the pulp and paper field. Representing *J. Korea TAPPI* during the interview was Hak Lae Lee, Ph.D., editor for *J. Korea TAPPI*, former president of Korea TAPPI, and professor emeritus at Seoul National University in South Korea.

J. Korea TAPPI: When did you first become aware of the Fundamental Research Symposium?

Panek: During my college years, I had a strong interest in the paper industry. While majoring in chemical engineering, I had the opportunity to work as a student intern at a paper mill in my hometown. At a library book sale at the university, I came across a volume from the very first Fundamental Research Symposium in 1957 and purchased it for just 50 cents. I found this book fascinating. It was eye-opening to see that research was being done on paper and enlightening to see the pictures and the discussions. I eventually discovered there is a whole series of symposia, and I've obtained a number of volumes over the years. I still pull out the old volumes and re-read them.

J. Korea TAPPI: When did you begin serving as chair of the FRC?

Panek: I've been a fan of the Fundamental Research Symposium since I first learned about it, so it is a privilege and an honor to be in this position. I've been a committee member since 2006, and became committee chair at the beginning of 2018, following the symposium in 2017. I was the chair for the 2022 symposium, which was delayed one year because of COVID. That was a learning experience for me, especially the details that go into organizing an event. We had 88 delegates, which is fewer than normal partly because of COVID. It was still a successful event.

The symposium is held every four years, alternating between Oxford and Cambridge in England. A highlight of our symposium is spending time with our colleagues from across the globe. We hold the symposia at colleges within the university to keep everything together in one spot. The 2022 symposium was at Jesus College in Cambridge. Most delegates stayed in college rooms, so we interacted lots during the technical sessions, had meals together, and socialized afterwards.

J. Korea TAPPI: The next Fundamental Research Symposium will be held this September. Could you please introduce it to us?

Panek: The 18th symposium will be held at Worcester College, Oxford, September 13-17, 2026. The title of the symposium is "Advances in Pulp and Paper Research." The program will include a keynote, six invited perspective speakers, and 26 technical presentations. The topics cover a broad range, including paper-water interactions, nanocellulose, cellulose-based packaging, paper mechanics, coating, and lignin-cellulosic materials. We've received over 60 submissions, and we've narrowed that down to less than 30 accepted papers for presentations. In addition, we'll have two poster sessions with around 30 post-

ers. The papers are published as a book and handed to the delegates at the start of the symposium.

J. Korea TAPPI: *How many participants do you expect to attend the upcoming symposium?*

Panek: We expect at least 100, and it will be great if we get around 120. The participants come from academia, institutes, and industry, and can be new to our industry or well-seasoned. Whoever comes to our symposium really enjoys it. It's a wonderful experience to live and learn at an Oxford college, with many opportunities to interact with colleagues you have known for years or others you may recognize by only name and publications. Our organizing group manages costs and builds sponsorships, making the experience affordable. The accommodation costs, including meals, are similar to, if not less than, what you would pay if you were to stay separately in Oxford.

J. Korea TAPPI: *Could you tell us about the early development of the Fundamental Research Symposium?*

Panek: The vision of the original organizers was to present and discuss fundamental research around themes to build our knowledge and scientific understanding of papermaking. The initial symposium in 1957 was on the fundamentals of papermaking fibers. The next one in 1961 was on the formation and structure of paper, followed by the consolidation of the web in 1965. Many notable researchers from around the world contributed. It built a lot of fundamental knowledge and understanding that carries on to today. The symposium is held every four years to allow more thorough research to be completed. I believe it is one of the most important events in our field — much like our own Olympics or World Cup.

J. Korea TAPPI: *There must have been many individuals who made significant contributions to the FRS.*

Panek: Many legendary figures have participated in the FRS. Toby Rance is a key person in our history for organizing and chairing the first symposium and keeping it going for the next 20-plus years. Derek Page, Johannes Van den Akker, Borje Steenberg, Jasper Mardon, Alfred Nissen, Kit Dodson, and many, many others made a great contribution to the society, as well as for our industry.

J. Korea TAPPI: *I assume that many people are actively involved with the FRS and symposium today.*

Panek: Yes, we have 16 FRC members, in addition to an event management company (SAS) and typesetting com-

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pany (RefineCatch), who are working together to make the upcoming symposium a success. As for key roles in the committee, Doug Coffin is the program secretary, Petri Mäkelä is the proceedings editor, Janet Preston is our publicity manager, and Bill Sampson is treasurer. We're good friends and we work closely together. Doug manages the review of submissions and builds the technical program from the accepted papers. Petri works with RefineCatch to format the manuscripts and publish the hard cover books and pdfs, in addition to transcribing discussions during the symposium sessions into an additional volume. Janet does a wonderful job at getting the word out through our website, LinkedIn profile, journals, and conferences. Many others are playing important roles by reviewing papers and chairing sessions. Oliver Phipps from SAS is our event organizer and helps with everything from booking the venue to keeping us on track.

J. Korea TAPPI: *We appreciate your permission to utilize materials from the FRS for development of educational textbooks for students studying pulp and paper science through Korea TAPPI. Could you share a message for KTAPPI members and students in Korea?*

Panek: I'm very pleased to have this opportunity to meet the members of Korea TAPPI. The FRS has always made great efforts to advance fundamental research in the pulp and paper industry and related fields, and I believe these efforts have led to meaningful achievements. I hope that talented young researchers will continue to lead this field in the future, and I am glad that FRS publications can contribute to the development of educational materials for the next generation. I also hope many of you will participate in the upcoming Fundamental Research Symposium in September.

The original version of this interview ran in the Journal of Korea TAPPI.