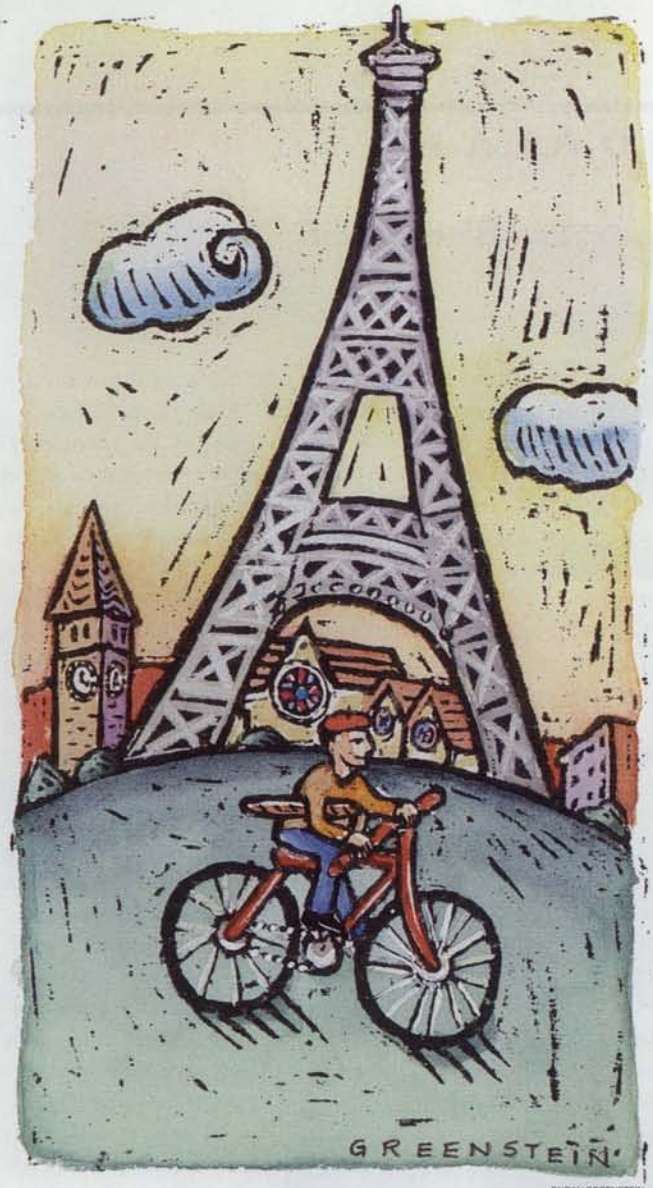

SUSAN GREENSTEIN

VIVE LA FRANCE

IN RECOGNITION OF ITS library resources, scholarly achievements, and teaching quality, Cornell has been named a Center of Excellence by the French government.

"The French government always has made culture one of its top priorities in its foreign policy," said Steven Kaplan, Goldwin Smith professor of history, who last year was named a Chevalier of the Order of Arts and Letters, one of France's highest honors.

"The Ministry of Foreign Affairs decided it would identify a handful of American universities which . . . would become bastions of activity for the study and research of things French." The designation follows the recent establishment of an interdisciplinary program in French studies within the College of Arts and Sciences. The new program requires students to develop proficiency in French and choose from a variety of non-language courses.

The menu includes Camus and his Contemporaries, Nineteenth Century French Women Writers, Francophone Caribbean Literature, and A Social History of Food and Eating. "French studies," said Kaplan, "doesn't mean grabbing the French flag and a baguette or sitting under the Eiffel Tower."

NOBEL CALLING

PROFESSOR DAVID M. LEE WAS UP AT 5:30 A.M., DOING EXERCISES for his bad back, when he got the long-distance call of a lifetime. After "a nice gentleman from Sweden" informed him he'd won the Nobel Prize in physics, Lee walked into the bedroom and asked his wife if she'd heard the phone ring. She had. "Good," he told her. "I wasn't dreaming."

Lee, who has taught on East Hill for nearly four decades, was one of three Cornellians who shared the 1996 physics prize. Fellow researchers Robert C. Richardson, the Floyd R. Newman professor of physics, and Douglas D. Osheroff, PhD '73, now a Stanford University professor, got similar phone calls early on a Wednesday morning in mid-October. (When Richardson got the news while attending a National Research Council meeting in Washington, D.C., the hotel desk clerk assumed that, considering all the fuss, he must have won the lottery. "That put it in perfect perspective," Richardson said.)

Lee (right) and Rawlings.

JON REIS / PHOTOLINK

The three were honored for work they did twenty-five years ago, while Osheroff was a doctoral student working under Richardson and Lee in Cornell's Laboratory of Atomic and Solid State Physics. There they discovered helium-3, a helium isotope that can be made a "superfluid"—meaning it can flow without resistance—at two-thousandths of a degree above absolute zero. The discovery, says N. David Mermin, the Horace White professor of physics, "transformed the direction of theoretical and experimental research in low-temperature physics." The work has implications for the field of superconductivity—and may even help describe the earliest moments of the universe.

In awarding the prize, the Nobel committee took the relatively unusual step of recognizing not only the work of two professors, but the graduate student who assisted them. "It's an outstanding example of the marriage of teaching and research at a great university," President Hunter Rawlings III said at a euphoric, jam-packed press conference—held, aptly enough, in the Bethe rooms atop Clark Hall. "The first thing David Lee did after winning this award," Rawlings told the crowd, "was teach Physics 213 at 8 a.m."

The award brings the number of Nobel laureates associated with Cornell to twenty-six. Among them are two current faculty members—physicist Hans Bethe, the John Wendell professor of physics emeritus, and chemist Roald Hoffmann, the John A. Newman professor of physical science—and such graduates as writer Pearl Buck, MA '25, Peace Prize winner John R. Mott 1888, and economist Robert Fogel '48. Of those twenty-six prizewinners, eleven are physicists.

Acknowledging the contributions of his colleagues in the field of low-temperature physics, Lee inadvertently brought the house down. "This discovery was really not made in a vacuum," he said, and 300 physicists laughed uproariously. "That wasn't," he added, "supposed to be a joke."