

ASPECTS OF FRANCONIA

March 2017 – Fraunhofer Institut

As you probably know, a group of Franconians will be visiting the Fraunhofer Institut in March to clue themselves up on how to make “growing older” a more manageable process. More precisely, they will be guests of Fraunhofer IIS (*Fraunhofer-Institut für Integrierte Schaltungen IIS*) located in Tennenlohe.

Although we have probably all heard of the Fraunhofer Institut, we probably know little about its history and its connections with Erlangen. The Fraunhofer Society for the Advancement of Applied Research was founded in Munich on March 26, 1949, by representatives of industry and academia, the government of Bavaria, and the newly established Federal Republic. Its mission statement commits the Fraunhofer Society to being a market and customer-oriented, nationally and internationally active sponsor organization for institutes of applied research.

It now boasts 67 institutes spread throughout Germany, each focusing on different fields of applied science (as opposed to the Max Planck Society, which works primarily on basic science). It currently employs around 24,000 people, mainly scientists and engineers, with an annual research budget of about €2.1 billion. Some basic funding for the Fraunhofer Society is provided by the state, but more than 70% of the funding is earned through contract work, either for government-sponsored projects or from industry.

Fraunhofer IIS in Erlangen, for example, drew attention to itself in the late 80s and early 90s with the development of mp3 technology, an exciting new means of encoding and storing music, enabling music fans to store their entire collections on equipment which is incredibly small. When we visit Fraunhofer IIS we'll be shown completely different aspects of modern technology, for example the “Fitness SHIRT” which features measuring equipment for ECG and respiration recording.

One last word: Where does the name Fraunhofer Society come from? It is named after Joseph von Fraunhofer, who, as a scientist, engineer, and entrepreneur, is said to have superbly exemplified the goals of the society. Born in 1787 in Straubing, he rose from humble beginnings to become a brilliant glass maker and the leading scientist of the time working in the field of optics. It is said that even the likes of Michael Faraday were unable to produce glass that could rival Fraunhofer's. And to return to our region for one last time: in 1822 he was awarded an honorary doctorate from the University of Erlangen for his work in optics...

Frank Gillard