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Intel's Ambassador Knows 102 Recipes

By Alec Luhn

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KAZAN — Despite 61 years and travel to 100 countries under his belt, John Davies exudes energy and enthusiasm as he bounces along in the back of a bus from an electronic school conference in Kazan to a local high school — never mind the back-to-back overnight flights he took to get here from Peru.

As Intel's de facto global ambassador and general manager of its World Ahead program, Davies spends an average of three out of every four weeks on the road. The program's stated mission is to promote access to technology around the globe, and Davies' role is to appear at events, visiting schools and overseeing Intel's various charitable education programs.

Davies said his current job has given him a new lease of life at the tail end of his thirty-plus year career at Intel, allowing him to do charitable work while still promoting his company. He meets about 10 heads of state each year, as well as countless students, educators and tech-industry businesspeople.

For Davies, these aspects of his work more than mitigate the grind of long working days

and near-constant travel.

"I'm very outbound; I want to be with people," Davies said. "You can't get me to sit in headquarters for too long; I want to be out there."

Through World Ahead, Intel donates teacher training and technology, mainly in the form of its Classmate PC, to schools in Russia with the hope that greater use of computers will boost overall sales of PCs — which are likely to contain Intel processors. One million teachers in Russia have been trained to use PCs in the classroom through Intel Teach, which has trained a total of 10 million teachers around the world. A girl from Kazan won one of the prizes in the 2011 Intel International Science and Engineering Fair competition, competing against 7 million students around the world.

"Good philanthropy can be good business," since teaching people to use computers opens up new markets, Davies said.

After growing up in postwar East London, Davies earned a B.S. in chemistry and a Ph.D. in solid state physics from the Imperial College at London University. He became an IBM postdoctoral research fellow and also worked as a development engineer at Philips before joining Intel in 1978.

During his long tenure at Intel, he has worked at almost "every job Intel's got" and won two of the company's Individual Achievement Awards.

He is also an accomplished swimmer, having swum the English Channel and placed well numerous times in an annual 1.5-mile race from Alcatraz Island to San Francisco.

When former Intel chief executive and chairman Craig Barrett retired in 2009, Davies' role expanded to include the duties of representing Intel at events such as the World Economic Forum and "running around emerging markets," he said.

The job has brought Davies, who studied Russian for two years in secondary school, back to Russia at least five times — he does not remember how many exactly. Intel has donated computers to more than 100 schools in Russia, Davies said, and has both commercial and charitable initiatives in the country.

Although a WikiLeaks cable released in 2010 showed that Intel threatened to move research and development from Russia to India or China, the company still conducts research here and maintains offices in Moscow, Nizhny Novgorod, Novosibirsk, St. Petersburg and Sarov. Davies said Russia's traditionally strong science and math education makes it an attractive destination for research and development, whereas the country's "good English skills" benefit Intel call centers here.

Besides Intel Teach, Intel has other programs that aim to increase consumer take-up of technology. Two years ago, the company began working with telecom companies in Russia including North-West Telecom, MTS and Rostelecom to include PCs or incentives to buy them in their Internet service packages.

"So we brought ... the market to the consumer by cooperating with the telecoms," Davies said.

"Probably the next big deal there is how do we bring prepaid broadband with telecoms with low-cost PCs so poorer people can afford Internet access. Just like you have prepaid cell phones, you can have prepaid broadband," he added.

Davies said prepaid broadband could be the "next big thing" in IT in Russia, but for it to take off access to low-cost PCs and parceled-out amounts of broadband need to be established.

The ambassador already has technology-starved countries 101 and 102 lined up: Ethiopia and Mongolia. But he stresses that each place requires its own approach.

They are all different, Davies said. "When trying to put together an education, health-care or PC-for-all-the-people program ... think of it as a recipe like cooking soup, but everyone's soup is a bit different."

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