Information scientist Herbert Van de Sompel to receive Paul Evan Peters Award

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Networked infrastructure to support scholarship among his contributions

LOS ALAMOS, N.M., July 26, 2017—Herbert Van de Sompel, research scientist at the Research Library of the Los Alamos National Laboratory, has been named the 2017 recipient of the Paul Evan Peters Award from the Coalition for Networked Information (CNI), the Association of Research Libraries, and EDUCAUSE. The award recognizes notable, lasting achievements in the creation and innovative use of network-based information resources and services that advance scholarship and intellectual productivity.

“For the last two decades Herbert, working with a range of collaborators, has made a sustained series of key contributions that have helped shape the current networked infrastructure to support scholarship,” noted CNI executive director Clifford Lynch. “While many people accomplish one really important thing in their careers, I am struck by the breadth and scope of his contributions.” Lynch added, “I’ve had the privilege of working with Herbert on several of these initiatives over the years, and I was honored in 2000 to be invited to serve as a special external member of the PhD committee at the University of Ghent, where he received his doctorate.”

Nominated by over a dozen highly respected members of the information science community, Van de Sompel is widely recognized as having created robust, scalable infrastructures that have had a profound and lasting impact on scholarly communication. The application of some of his groundbreaking work has become an integral part of the core technology infrastructure for thousands of libraries worldwide, helping to connect information across the Internet, and constantly working to further his dream of “a scholarly communication system that fully embraces the Web.”

An accomplished researcher and information scientist, Van de Sompel is perhaps best known for his role in the development of protocols designed to expose data and make them accessible to other systems, forging links that connect related information, thereby enhancing, facilitating, and deepening the research process. These initiatives include the OpenURL framework (stemming from his earlier work on the SFX link resolver), as well as the Open Archives Initiative (OAI), which included the Protocol for Metadata
Harvesting (OAI-PMH) and the Object Reuse and Exchange (OAI-ORE) scheme. Other notable contributions include the Memento protocol, which enables browsers to access earlier versions of the Web easily, and ResourceSync, which allows applications to remain synchronized with evolving content collections.

“I applaud Van de Sompel's milestones in developing robust scalable digital infrastructure for the world of research which is the crucial underpinning for a future that could promote unfettered access for all to the entire scholarly corpus,” stated Elliott Shore, Association of Research Libraries executive director.

Van de Sompel was hired by his alma mater, Ghent University (Belgium), in 1981 to begin library automation. Over time, the focus shifted to providing access to a wide variety of scholarly information sources leveraging the technologies of the day to reach the largest possible end-user base, and by the late 1990s, the work of his team was considered among the best in Europe. In 2000 he received a PhD from Ghent University, working on context-sensitive linking, which led to the OpenURL standard and library linking servers. Following stints at Cornell University and at the British Library, in 2002 he joined Los Alamos as an information scientist, where he now leads the Prototyping Team at the Research Library. He also serves as visiting professor at the DANS data archive in the Netherlands.

Widely sought after for advisory boards and panels, Van de Sompel served as a member of the European Union High Level Expert Group on Scientific Data, as well as the Core Experts Group for the Europeana Thematic Network, charged with building a digital repository of European cultural assets. He has won numerous awards, including the Los Alamos National Laboratory Fellows Prize for Outstanding Research (2015) and the SPARC Innovator Award (2006) by the Scholarly Publishing and Academic Resources Coalition (SPARC), of which he was the first recipient.

A four-member committee selected Van de Sompel for the award: Jeffrey MacKie-Mason, university librarian and chief digital scholarship officer at the University of California, Berkeley; Marilyn McMillan, (retired), former vice president for IT and chief IT officer at New York University; Winston Tabb, Sheridan dean of university libraries and museums at Johns Hopkins University; and Joan Lippincott, associate executive director of the Coalition for Networked Information.

Named for CNI’s founding director, the award will be presented during the CNI membership meeting in Washington, DC, to be held December 11–12, 2017, where Van de Sompel will deliver the Paul Evan Peters Memorial Lecture. The talk will be recorded and made available on CNI’s YouTube and Vimeo channels after the meeting concludes. Previous award recipients include Donald A.B. Lindberg (2014), Christine L. Borgman (2011), Daniel Atkins (2008), Paul Ginsparg (2006), Brewster Kahle (2004), Vinton Cerf (2002), and Tim Berners-Lee (2000).

For more information, visit the award website, or contact the CNI communications coordinator at diane@cni.org.

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Los Alamos National Laboratory  www.lanl.gov  (505) 667-7000  Los Alamos, NM

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