Joseph S. DeBlasi Interview June 4, 2009

New York City

NORBERG: Today is June 4, 2009. I'm here with Joseph S. DeBlasi for an interview about himself, and also for the years that he was executive director for ACM. Joe, you were kind enough to send me some personal information, some background on your professional life. I'd like you to expand on those a little bit more. Your date of birth is November 9, 1935. Your father was Pasquale DeBlasi, Sr., who had an accounting degree from City College of New York and was a financial executive. Your mother name was Marion Genco DeBlasi. You have two brothers. Dr. Pasquale DeBlasi Jr. who obtained his doctorate from Columbia University and is a psychoanalyst. Your brother Frank DeBlasi studied physical education but owned a number of small businesses and work also for the State of New York. (Post Interview Note: Joe's Brother Frank died three months after this interview after a two year battle with cancer.)

NORBERG: Now, I want to explore influences on your life and education. I'm interested in particular in a type of study at the elementary school, was it a magnet school or not. When did you go on to high school and where, and what sort of program did they have?

DEBLASI: I will start off by telling you that the greatest influence, on the importance of education in my life, was my father. He was insistent that all of us going on to college. My father was a brilliant man both from a practical and intelligent sense. My father interests spanned a lot of subjects. He was the kind of individual that encouraged the exploration of ideas. So we grew in that kind of environment.

I think he always had thought that most of us would go into law. However, towards the end of my high school career I said, "Dad, I'm interested in mathematics and the sciences, and that's the path I'm going to take." And that was the educational path I took. My brother Pat went on to law school, but decided that wasn't for him either and he went on to study psychiatry. If my brothers and I had one constant in our upbringing, it would have to be my father's strong feeling about education.

I was a very bright student things came easily to me right though college. That doesn't mean I was always a good student. I had a lot of interests beyond my studies baseball for one. I could easily get through my courses with no problem. I attended grammar school at PS 114 in Brooklyn New York, and went on to Bishop Loughlin High School also in Brooklyn. I went on to Virginia Tech, and then did my graduate work at George Washington and University of Hawaii when I was in the Air Force.

There is one thing I'd point out about my New York grammar school education which was excellent. The reason it was excellent was because of the limited position women were in regarding career opportunities. Women in the fifties didn't have many opportunities, teaching and nursing were the two big professional fields women entered. We had the most talented women teaching us, they would expand our minds and interests, in so many ways because they were brilliant and talented individuals.

Many of my teachers today could be heads of corporations or lawyers or doctors or whatever they wanted to be. I always point this out because anybody who went to grammar school in the '40s and early '50s I am sure kind of feel that way. It was a different world. So I got an excellent, excellent education. And the public school system in those days in New York was second to none. Then my father decided that I was going to get an even better education by going to a catholic high school, and the parochial high schools, again in those days, were among the cream of the crop in New York. In high school, some of the teachers I had reinforced my feelings and interest in mathematics and science.

I had only one subject that I hated and in a way it's had something to do with why I went to Virginia Tech—I hated foreign languages. This was the only subject I ever had to study for, and I hated languages with a passion. So when I selected what I was going study in college I decided I'd get around the language by taking engineering, and selected aeronautical engineering. Now at that time there were only so many schools that had aeronautical engineering, and I wanted to go away from home to go to school, Virginia Tech had one of the best courses in the field. So that's how I ended up at Virginia Tech.

After a year I said this is silly, I really don't want to be an engineer. I want to study mathematics and science, so I switched over to mathematics.

NORBERG: Who was there at the time in mathematics?

DEBLASI: Dr. T.W. Hatcher was head of the Mathematics Department and Dean Burke Johnston was dean of the School of Science both were outstanding teachers and individuals.

NORBERG: Describe some of the courses.

DEBLASI: Many of the students from Virginia had to take preparatory math courses. But because of my strong high school education I went straight into calculus. From differential and integral calculus, I went on to advanced math including such subjects as partial differential equations and Fourier series. If you look at the curriculum of Virginia Tech in mathematics at that point in time, it was pretty extensive but did stress applied mathematics. Today a number of the courses that I took are in graduate programs. In conjunction with math, I took a good number of physics and engineering courses because of my interest in science. While I was going through college, my career objectives became that of making the military a career. At the time Virginia Tech was a military college with a Corps of Cadets. I decided to go into the Air Force and make it a career. I became the second in command of the Corps of Cadets which was pretty good for a Yankee. The flow from Virginia Tech into the Air Force had a couple of twists and turns. One was that I had a year before I needed to go on active duty, I got married to my wife Helen and during that year I taught mathematics at the high school (Bishop Loughlin) I graduated from, and at night I teach remedial math to college students, who were having problems with some of the math courses. Then I went into the Air Force.

Soon after flight training, they sent me to Washington to the Air Research and Development Command. They were trying to get some young career officers with math and scientific background to figure out what they were going to do with these things called computers. This is 1958. Even though the Air Force had progressed somewhat in the use of computers it was a new technology. I remember I walked into this room filled with electronic boxes and all I saw was lights flashing and tape drives spinning. I went up to see a Major Snyder who said, "I've got you and four other lieutenants and you are all going to be trained and start

building our base level and weapon systems management programs.” It was a pretty good plan to put us in the Air Research and Development Command, which eventually became Air Force Systems Command in charge of all Air Force weapon systems and missile programs.

NORBERG: Where was that located?

DEBLASI: In Washington at Andrews Air Force Base. General Bernard Shriver was the AFSC Commander, and the head of the USAF missile and space development programs. Without sound self-serving—I quickly became the Air Force’s young star in computers. Here I was, a young man, a lieutenant, and I was already advising on how to spend millions of dollars on computer and contributing to decisions on what kind of computer technology and systems we should develop.. I got deeply involved in designing the weapons development management systems and the first integrated base level management system. After a few years I was about to be assigned to teach at the Air Force Academy. That was the assignment that they had given me after my years at Research and Development. My commander called me in and said, “Joe, we would like you to stay and finish the work your involved in which we feel is critical to AFSC. If you will we will take care of your next assignment.” I really wanted to teach at the Air Force Academy which was new at that time but I agreed. So a year and a half later they assigned me to PACAF Headquarters in Hawaii.

It was in Hawaii that I decided to leave the Air Force. The reason was because my wife became very ill. We had a young daughter at the time, and it was difficult for me to visualize being able to continue a military career. Therefore I decided to leave the Air Force to join IBM—this was early in 1964. Thank God, my wife’s illness was cured a year later.

Of course, IBM which knew of my work in the Air Force took me right in and I went back to Washington, DC and became part of their group that handled the Pentagon the Air Force Systems Command, RAND Corporation, Miter Corporation and System Development Corporation. I went into IBM as a professional and was given these major accounts with national account responsibility.

Now I will tell you, I follow only one premise in life that I learned as a young flyer. The most useless thing in world is the runway behind you. So I approached this change of careers without ever looking back. IBM became my new focus and I just move forward. Was it a disappointment that I couldn’t take my first choice and go that way? Yes. But it was not something that I gave a lot of thought to afterwards. The Air Force gave me a great opportunity with great responsibility as a very young man. Going with IBM was my second big opportunity because it was a wonderful corporation. I moved very quickly in IBM. I went on to major management positions and then on to running their whole international standards effort and getting involved in international standards and international issues dealing with technology.

NORBERG: I’d like not to race that fast, if you don’t mind. I’m not looking for proprietary information or anything of that kind. I admire IBM and have done a lot work with them. But I saw from the paper that you sent me in the email that you were national sales representative for RAND and SDC and Miter and so on. What was that position like? How did you go day to day?

DEBLASI: From IBM’s Washington, DC, Office, and I did a lot of flying out to the coast because that’s where a lot of these people were. My involvement there was to take the IBM program and make sure that program serviced the needs of these major organizations. But

because I had previous contacts with these major customers in my work at Air Research and Development Command, my ability to interface with these organizations was very easy. So IBM had people out there who were their service people. My job was to look at what they were doing, the advanced work they wanted to do, and put IBM in a position to be able to respond. So that is the kind of work that I did at that point in time. What did I see at that time? I mean, I was there when they were working on the RAND tablet, as an example, and some of the other kind of unique things RAND was doing. They were going into time-sharing and I brought IBM's resources in working with them to achieve their time-sharing objectives. IBM was having big problems in their time-sharing program at that point in time and we had a lot of joint sessions with these major customers. It was only a couple of years before they put me on the management route. In only a short time I went on then to become marketing manager, branch manager etc. it went very fast.

NORBERG: Director of Revenue Planning?

DEBLASI: Well, after I got through all of the typical marketing management positions, IBM had this approach that if you on the fast track, periodically they took you out of the line and they made you administrative or executive assistant to a vice president. This gave you a broader exposure to business and to the corporation. I had that several such assignments in my career. The other thing they did periodically is if you didn't have a particular type of business background where they felt that you could...they took you and gave you an assignment to broaden your experience. As an example they move me into the financial area as head of revenue planning? I wasn't a financial type. It was almost like giving me a MBA on the job, because here I was in revenue planning for the major revenue division of the corporation. That gave me exposure to all of the people in finance and an opportunity to understand how the financial aspects of IBM worked and also to be part of the planning mechanism. Right after that, I went back to another of these special assignments as executive assistant to the corporate vice president, who was involved with our interrelations on technology with the outside world. It is from there that I became the corporate head of standards for IBM.

NORBERG: Okay. Can we do standards in just a moment? I asked you a question about revenue planning. I'm surprised at the answer, to be quite frank. Not that I don't agree with you; that's not the point. But this is a big jump for someone who has been in the company for what, five years or something. How many people were chosen for that program in any given year? Were you the only one? Were there five others?

DEBLASI: I'm the only one that I know of that was ever put in that particular job that did not come out of the financial community. The job I had was revenue planning for the data processing division, as an example, was in fact the revenue planning job—that's where all the major revenue was produced. So I got to deal with the IBM Comptroller, VP of Finance and Executive heads of the corporation. It was unique I guess I had displayed the kind of business and management capabilities, that they felt, it was important for me to get this background.

NORBERG: How many people were in that divisions doing the kind of work you were doing?

DEBLASI: Oh, in finance? I don't remember how many people they had in finance.

NORBERG: Take a guess.

DEBLASI: Oh, I would say a few hundred people.

NORBERG: So the people you had access to were the people who wanted to talk to you.

DEBLASI: It was a pretty big domain. I'm talking just the corporate, divisional level. I'm not talking about who we had working out in other financial areas.

NORBERG: I wasn't asking that question either. Who was the director of the data processing division at the time?

DEBLASI: That was Ralph Pfeiffer. Now that's the unique part. Ralph Pfeiffer was the person that I was administrative assistant to in the data processing division when I was doing all that work with RAND and so forth and then they moved me to management. Just prior to my going into management in a special program I became administrative assistant to Ralph Pfeiffer. I'll put it this way: it is not unusual in IBM to be tied to people. When they know you and they move into broader responsibilities, if they have a respect for you they present you with opportunities. Now Ralph was only there for a very short period of time then he moved on to become Senior VP and head of the IBM's Pacific arena.

NORBERG: Did he take you with him?

DEBLASI: No. That was really the last time I worked directly with Ralph. But I'm sure every time I moved they talked to people like Ralph who knew me. As I moved higher up in IBM, I brought people along that I had great respect for as well.

NORBERG: So who was head of commercial and industry relations?

DEBLASI: That was Wally Dowd.

NORBERG: I know of him, but I don't know him. In fact I haven't met any names yet that you mentioned.

DEBLASI: Well, you would know Tom Watson Junior. You would know John Opal.

NORBERG: I know of them.

DEBLASI: These people you would know because they became the heads of IBM. Unless you really got into IBM and knew the next layer, some of the names I would use you wouldn't necessarily be familiar with.

NORBERG: Jim Birkenstock.

DEBLASI: Birkenstock was the predecessor of Wally Dowd. Dowd took Birkenstock's place when Birkenstock retired. Birkenstock lived down in Florida and he'd come up periodically, so I got to know him briefly. I don't know if Birkenstock is still alive.

NORBERG: No. He isn't. He died two years ago in his nineties.

DEBLASI: Sorry to hear that. So Wally Dowd followed Birkenstock. Wally Dowd was pretty much known in the external community because in his job, he handled the relationship with all our competitors, he handled the relationships with Europe and Asia on technology and patents. I became his executive assistant and at the end of the assignment, which was about a year he asked me if I would like to join his staff and take over the standards area. The opportunity was fine with me because it was an interesting area and gave me international responsibility.

NORBERG: What did it entail?

DEBLASI: As corporate head of standards I was responsible for the approval and enforcement of all product standards. Equally and probably larger was my responsibility to represent IBM in the external standards community for the purposes of being sure that the standards that were being developed would not adversely impact IBM and that IBM was in a position to make contributions to those standards. The external standards area probably took much more of my time than enforcement. I had staff members and people at the product divisions to ensure standards compliance.

Being IBM's Director of Standards started me traveling the world and being involved in all of these national and international standards activities. You have to remember at that time IBM was considered the Goliath of the industry and the Europeans and competitors all wanted to make inroads in areas where our technology was pretty dominant. One way they could do that would be if they could get a standard accepted that were contrary to IBM's technology. Like the I/O interface standard, like our SNA networking standard, they wanted the open systems interconnection standards. So when you represented IBM, there were two things that really came into play. The first was to protect IBM's business interest; to make sure things were not done in a way that would adversely impact the investment we had in our major technologies. The second was to manage that process so there was a good feeling on both sides and we were not being obstructionists. We made major contributions to all the standards efforts. I believe these efforts were positive for us, our customers and the industry.

In 1977 the IT standards community got into dealing with anticipatory standards, which was a new direction. Standards in other technology were usually a documentation of current technology. If you were representing a corporation, you looked at your corporate interests and at times if you took a leadership position in standards, as I did in heading up the US and international committees, you had to wear a second hat and work to obtain national, international and industry agreement. This kind of program became even more dramatic as the European Community (EU), started trying to use standards I believe to limit IBM.

Now, if you took OSI in its original form in regard to SNA, what you would find a model that was different from SNA. We were actually able to bring the two closer in line so that a lot of aspects of SNA would map to OSI. SNA was really a much more robust technology only because OSI was more of a theoretical model. We also got involved in telecommunications standards, which are represented in the lower layers of the OS. This involved was in the CCITT committee of the International Telecommunication Union (ITU). Often I was part of the State Department's delegations to these organizations. The State Department's delegations would have industry members on them including ATT and IBM. At the ITU Plenipotentiary in 1982 in Nairobi, I was a major industry representative as part of that US delegation to the ITU which

required the understanding that you're there to represent US interests. So the standards position was really a very far-reaching type position, and I was in it for a good number of years.

What happened towards the end of it was I and my staff was getting a very good feel for what direction the technology was going, particularly with regard to distributive architecture. IBM was still going along with large central systems. It became apparent to me in 1988 IBM was going in the wrong direction. We presented our concerns but our views were not accepted and were inconsistent with the product direction. Whether or not the trouble that IBM got into starting in the mid '80s to the mid '90s was because they thought that they controlled the market, or a reluctance to make a major product shifts, or a misreading of the environment, I will leave to corporate history. It was probably all of the above. John Akers was president at the time, and I always felt bad for John. John was a capable executive and could have been a one of IBM's great CEO. But I felt he got some very bad technology advice.

NORBERG: Not unusual.

DEBLASI: Maybe books are already out on IBM, discussing that period and what happened. If there are I am sure some of the same things are referred to. At that point, I decided that was enough. I was in IBM for 25 years and I didn't believe in being part of something and not believing in it.

NORBERG: Okay, let me just go back for a couple of clarifications. When did you become corporate director?

DEBLASI: In 1976.

NORBERG: So you were there for almost 12 years. That's a long time. Secondly, can you offer some examples (one or two is all you need to try and focus on) about how the standards activity works? I know something about the ACM's involvement in other standards, but I'd like to understand where IBM focused its energies. That's one part of it. The second part is did they ever have to face a determined position of say the EU that they had to go back and redevelop some of the things that they had in order to make it match.

DEBLASI: Okay, I'll take the first one. In information technology standards the following organizations were involved.

In the US: The X3 Committee of the American National Standards Institute (ANSI), was basically the key US committee on IT standards. CBMA which was the US industry group was the secretariat for the X3 committee.

Internationally: The ISO TC97 committee was the major international committee on information technology standards. Then there were standards activities in the IEC, which was a comparable organization to the ISO. . For the telecommunication standards we had the ITU and CCITT.

In Europe: ECMA was a group of manufacturers in Europe including IBM because we manufactured in Europe we were ECMA members.

When I first got into to it, these were all the major organizations. The one thing I will say is I worked very hard at trying to consolidate a lot of these efforts. We were finally able to combine

the information technologies standardization work of the IEC and the ISO into the Joint Technical Committee (JTC1), which became the focal point for all international IT standards. As they were for TC97, ANSI became the Secretariat for JTC1 maintaining United States leadership.

NORBERG: Is this with mainframes or everything?

DEBLASI: Everything, including such diverse areas as programming languages, Open Systems Interconnection (OSI), document standards, and safety standards, the whole realm of IT standards. The X3 organization which I headed for many years housed all our major committees corresponding to JTC1 and represented the US in the international arena. From an organizational standpoint, we also began to move this work together in the US. We developed a closer relation with the CCITT, which was part of the ITU because they were dealing with the lower levels of the OSI model.

However, as I often use to say in speeches, standardization was a rich man's game. It can be played by major companies like IBM, DEC, ATT, etc. and government organizations like the American National Standards Institute and Standards interests in the EU, Japan, and Asia, as well as major corporations from Europe and Asia. Missing were the users. The users didn't participate. We didn't have a GM representative as an example. We had government representatives, but we didn't have a GM or Citibank representative. These were all people using the technology and all these standards, but they never got involved in the standards development work.

NORBERG: Did they decline or were they never asked?

DEBLASI: It was open to them, but they didn't see that as part of their mission. So they relied on their manufacturers to represent their interests because that's the technology they invested in. So when we tried to do things for IBM, not only were we protecting IBM's business, but the investment of all of our customers at the same time. Users did get involved when they tried to make a major change in the COBOL standard. COBOL, as you know, was a major programming language at the time.

NORBERG: Well, can you give an example where standards are being developed where they weren't meshing properly from an IBM standpoint of course?

DEBLASI: From a long time, the OSI standard. I would say that OSI is probably the best example, but after a lot of effort it did eventually align. First of all, TCP/IP became the heart of the lower levels, and as such, it really took away a lot of the incompatibilities that may have been produced otherwise.

NORBERG: Yes, but at first I was under the impression that the Europeans rejected that as the standard.

DEBLASI: They did. They were really trying in the beginning to think of something completely new, but eventually what they thought of as being the lower layers really meshed itself back in ITC/PC and the CCITT standards. OSI never became a standard. It became a

model, and it's a good model. Charles W. Bachman, a Turing Award winner was the person who initiated the OSI effort. Bachman was an outstanding individual and I enjoyed knowing him and being involved with him in the standards community.

NORBERG: All right. Were you interested at all in ACM at this point? Say in 1987.

DEBLASI: I knew of ACM, but I made it a practice of not belonging to any organizations when I was involved in the standards community so I would not get into any conflicts on representations. I did not get involved with ACM or the IEEE Computer Society. IEEE was involved with standards in IT partially in developing the LAN standard and some fundamental hardware and safety standards. I read a lot of the ACM literature and they were represented in some standard activities.

NORBERG: All right, then in 1989, you had no connection with ACM. And you were only involved with IBM for about three months as a consultant after retiring.

DEBLASI: Yes. The day I left IBM I was back as a consultant and did that for a period of time. Then in the fall of that year, I was contacted by ACM. They had a search committee and my name got to them. They were interviewing several people. Dave Brandin was heading the search committee at the time. They asked me about it, and I said, "Okay, I think I'd be interested." Again, I don't want this to sound too high in the sense of purposes, but I had felt the field had been very good to me, it had furnished my lifestyle, my way of living, my security, and so forth. I said, "Well, maybe if I could be of some service here, it could be a way of returning something to the community." I had an initial conversation with Dave, and I had a number of other interviews after that. I had no idea what I was getting into but I was an experienced executive and basically understood what made organizations work. I had some knowledge of what made up a nonprofit versus a profit organization. I certainly knew what the differences were but I had not been involved in a organizations like ACM. I had been on boards of nonprofit organizations like museums and other cultural organizations. So I spoke with Dave. Then I was interviewed by John White and the president, Bryan Kocher, and a number of other people.

NORBERG: I read a document in the files, in this case Kocher's files that he gave to the Babbage. Ultimately they will be blended with some records which are also there. But in looking through some of those papers, David did say many things about initiatives, about results, about we're not going to do this because, agendas for meetings, and so on. In there, I saw the paragraphs I put in this document, and it's not something that I would say is written by you for the reason what the subjects are and so on: "Responsible for worldwide corporate standards program. Involved in establishing product standards and negotiating with industry organizations and government to establish technology standards. Has management experience with staff size ranging from 150-1000 in number. Budget responsibility from \$5 million up through \$3 billion. Extensive experience in speaking for IBM associations in government. Held numerous leadership positions with CBEMA, International Standards Organization, Joint Technical Committee Number One." And that's the end of the quotation. I had the impression from reading it that this was not something that either you had written or that Dave Brandin had written, but it came from a headhunter. Do you know anything about that?

DEBLASI: No. It could have come from a placement firm. When you retired from IBM at that point in time, they always gave you access to an executive placement firm. I wasn't particularly looking for anything, but I did meet with these firms and they may have been the ones that made a contact, providing some information. The only thing that is not correct in that is the \$3 billion budget statement. Our work could have product impacts in billions of dollars but the actual budgetary amounts that I was directly concerned with in my IBM career was in the millions and millions of dollars.

NORBERG: So you were contacted by whom first, do you recall?

DEBLASI: From ACM I was contacted by Dave first. At least my first discussion was with Dave. ACM had an executive firm that I think first contacted me to arrange a meeting.

NORBERG: Yes, because he was already beginning to put most of his time in elsewhere, after he had been past president.

DEBLASI: He was not past president at that time, but he was heading the search committee. That was the reason I met with him.

NORBERG: How did the search go when you went in for an interview?

DEBLASI: They did what I would say was a very good job. They were very professional about it. They gave me the opportunity to go one-on-one with Dave, and then I met with a group and met one-on-one with anybody who wanted and it was pretty professional, I thought. They knew what they were looking for without giving a complete definition and I got a chance to meet a couple of staff people very briefly. Of course, when they announced, I met the entire staff at the time. It didn't seem like it was a long time from the first interview to the time when they made the decision. I came to ACM late that year 1989; I think it was November or December.

NORBERG: Toward the end of November. Well, this is much faster than the academic world, anyway. Yes, it's really much more of a problem in there than elsewhere. What were some of your impressions of ACM at that point when you went through the interview process and they made you an offer?

DEBLASI: I had already had a firm understanding of the professional nature of ACM. I already had a firm understanding of the role it played historically and, to a degree, continued to play within the computing community. I had visualized its active membership to be a little broader than what I eventually found, but as I began to understand the organization it was certainly understandable about where the leadership came from.

NORBERG: Where did it come from?

DEBLASI: It came from primarily the academic and the research community as opposed to what I would call the development and the corporate community.

There was only one person with whom I spoke and that was actually after I took the position; that had a very negative feeling about ACM, and that was the outgoing Executive Director.

NORBERG: He was not a happy camper

DEBLASI: He was very happy to be leaving. He was probably the only person that I spoke to that had a real problem. I don't know what I would have thought if I had spoken to him at the beginning. We had lunch together at the University Club here in NY. I could see the depth of what he was feeling because he was trying to hold back and couldn't. You know like when somebody is trying not to say something, and yet it comes out anyway. But then I got into ACM, and made my own judgments.

NORBERG: Well, how did he characterize ACM, if you don't mind my asking?

DEBLASI: Like it was a big headache and he couldn't ever get anything done. Like he knew what should be done but it just required too much energy to get the cooperation he needed.

NORBERG: That's interesting. That's not what he said to me, necessarily.

DEBLASI: Well, that's was my impression. It wasn't the fact that he didn't try. I never got the impression that he wasn't dedicated to ACM. He was worn down—just too many people, too many interests, too many things making progress difficult.

NORBERG: If he had a corporate background, he would rather have seen some hierarchy, I would guess.

DEBLASI: Well, I got the feeling right then and there that changes were needed—and I don't know when you want to get into my feelings about ACM as I came in and what we found?

NORBERG: Yes, I do want to. I picked out the strategic planning report that was given just as you arrived, November of 1989. I've asked several people who would have seen that report, like John and Stuart Zweben, and they said that's what they saw in ACM as a management structure. John was bit more elaborative of his position as to why it was designed this way and who was doing what. So we did get some names attached to those. And Stu Zweben also added names to those.

DEBLASI: Names just as I came in?

NORBERG: Well, that's what I'll ask you about. But they would give me later we looked over this fellow, and two years after that we had this new woman come in, and so on. Not very helpful at all. But was this the organizational structure when you arrived?

DEBLASI: Looks like something that was here. I didn't really pay too much attention to any document. I evaluated what I found and how the organization worked, and then I put together in my mind an organization and I felt we needed to move forward. Now you have to remember I came out the corporate world. When they took me, I think they were looking for a few things that were important to them. One was that they were looking for executive level management, someone who understood organization and the running of an organization. Second they were looking for somebody who understood that there was a financial responsibility aspect to making

decisions. Third, they were looking for somebody who had an international reputation and could add to the international scope of ACM and what they might be able to do to enlarge that scope. Lastly, I think they were looking for somebody that they felt they could work with.

I think these were the core elements upon which the committee made the selection. But I told them at the beginning. "If I take it, I'm running the organization. I understand the purpose of the board. I understand the purpose of the president and Executive Committee. I understand what you want to be involved in but we can't have 20 people running the organization." I think they felt that there were a number of significant problems and they were structured in a way that they weren't getting the efficiencies that they wanted, that they were willing to go ahead and give me a bit of a free hand.

So when I came in, I found the following: A very compartmentalized headquarters structure, I found a volunteer structure that was also compartmentalized where everybody kind of just ran their own things according to their areas of interest and I found a bad financial situation with a bad prognosis.

The amount of reserve money we had was not sufficient to run the organization for more than few months. So that was a critical finding and it was clear that decisions had to be made, especially financial decisions, to correct this situation. It really took only about a month to get a full view, I had each staff give me full briefings, and then I did some additional research. Soon after that, I restructured headquarters. I established a director over each major business and support area and I established Pat Ryan as deputy executive director.

Now, why did I select Pat? One is Pat had probably the best operational knowledge of the organization. Second, she was somebody very committed to the organization. Third I saw in her a great set of qualities to build on. She had come up the administrative line, and was kind of looked at in that way. But I said, "Pat looks to me like the person we should invest in, if you're going to invest time in developing someone, this was the person you want to spend time developing."

Then I took key people, the head of publications to head the publications area. I took another very strong woman who had a lot of background and probably was the one person who would say things in a very direct way and not be afraid to take an opposite view to a degree, but who I felt was very key, and I made that person the head of the SIG area.

NORBERG: Who was that?

DEBLASI: Peggy Cooper. The reason I organized that way was I wanted to bring all that SIG activity under one control. I had membership under Jim Adams, who had great relations with the membership over many years. I had the administration area here under Pat, along with the directors of Finance and MIS. The administration of the executive board was also under Pat. Then we took that organization to the Executive Committee for final approval which they did. I basically went from there, as far as corporate structure is concerned.

Now, the other thing we did was we moved the volunteer structure into compatible areas. So we had the SIG Department with the SIG Board, we had the Publication Department with the Publication Board, we had the Membership Department with the Membership Board. Basically we lined the corporate structure with the organization so that our service alignment was better defined.

Then we looked at the whole financial question. The first thing I said was, "We're going to get a standing rule from the Council. They're not going to set what the dues are, or what the publications costs are going to be every year. I got them to agree that 'Every year, we

can increase prices by at least an amount equal to inflation.’ That allowed us to begin to grow our revenues so we could get our finances into a better position. We began to really put pressure on the SIG to hold their down their cost and improve their conference margins. Accounting wise, we kept SIG money and publication money and membership money kind of in separate accounts, but I immediately said that there was only one corporate account. We still kept the sub accounts but the corporate finances were the total funds.

NORBERG: That’s still the case.

DEBLASI: It probably still is today. Each area knows how much money they have in their accounts so to speak, but in essence, it’s part of the corporate funds. When I came in, we were down to less than a million dollars in the bank collectively. When I left, we were probably up to fifty million in the bank by managing this entire structure. It is probably a great deal more today.

The key was that we had to bring a corporate structure into place from a headquarters standpoint and put the responsibilities under capable leadership. As I previously said I made Jim Adams the head of membership because he was the one person that really had a lot of contact with members. From a personality standpoint, he was Mr. ACM. I took our finance, computing capabilities and administration and put them under Pat, who was also dealing with the administrative support of the Council and EC. Reporting to me was Pat, the SIG group, Membership and Publications. This allowed me to concentrate on the mission functions and thru Pat oversee the support functions. That was the main structure.

The first couple of years, we spent quite a bit of time on bringing the SIGs into a more cooperative state, because a number of them were discussing splitting off. SIGGRAPH felt they ran the graphics world. SIGCHI felt they ran the human interface world. DEC felt they ran the design world. It was important that they felt that way it showed leadership. We didn’t want to take away the real interest they had in their field by diluting it. What we wanted to do was to integrate it into more of a federated concept rather than individual people making their own rules and not being part of the organization. So we set a group of rules and we set a group of costs centers for services. So that really began to move us financially and we also put a lot of effort into membership and publications.

Then, of course, as time went on, we made some really big major moves. At the same time as we were making these changes in the first couple of years, the Internet was coming into play, and we began to look at the electronic area as a way to provide services and publications. So we went into a major program of building the digital library. That was very key. And we dealt with that by putting together, I think, one of the first real business plans for a digital library anywhere. As we began to move in that direction ACM, I think, began to provided probably the primary leadership in this whole digital library community, certainly for organizations of our type. Eventually it became as sophisticated as it is today to where your interface with ACM is an electronic interface. Members have their own portal with their areas of interest. This was all part of a strategic plan which has been carried out and defined and improved over the years. Our MIS area under Wayne has done a great job.

NORBERG: I didn’t see it.

DEBLASI: I presented it as my last presentation. It shows everything we had worked on.

NORBERG: Well, I have something like that. If you remember, there was a written portion of the text and that was meant to be an indication that we're talking about your interests, your approach.

DEBLASI: Yes. Do you have a copy of this report?

NORBERG: Yes, I have it here. I do. And there's another one right here.

DEBLASI: This one here?

NORBERG: No, I've never seen that.

DEBLASI: This is the write up of the presentation that I gave to the Council.

NORBERG: Okay, those four or five things that I have there mesh with that report?

DEBLASI: I'm not sure what this is. All right, let me cover a couple of things and then we can go back to it.

The other big initiative which had to do with why I came was to move this organization internationally. You had to decide whether ACM was an American organization with international members, or if we were an international organization with members from all countries. I began to move the leadership of the organization to expand internationally. We began holding Executive Committee meetings outside the United States. We began pushing for international membership. We went to China. We went to Europe a number of times. We began to get representations from key members in those countries to participate and got them on the board and got them involved in the ACM leadership. We began to meet with other international societies. We did this to really give the view that ACM was an international organization. It was a major move, to move this organization international. When we began to do that, we had to get the leadership of the organization involved. That meant taking them into the international arena, getting international people into conversations with them, looking at trying to expand to areas like Egypt and the Middle East, and Asia. Now this is where my international reputation and international background worked because I could steer them into that direction. Today, I believe ACM, even though most membership is still out of the US, we are considered a major international organization.

The other thing is we had to break away from this AFIPS situation, an idea for which I found great sympathy and support. AFIPS was dissolved. First of all, our biggest competitor was always the IEEE Computer Society. Basically, I took the approach, unlike others, to ignore them. Not because they're not a good and influential organization but I wanted to ignore the competition question because there wasn't any benefit to it. You could spend your lifetime worried about something that's not going to really affect you.

NORBERG: Why do you think it wouldn't affect you?

DEBLASI: First of all, a lot of the people who belong to the Computer Society belonged to us as well. It wasn't exclusive. If we could do programs that could attract people, it didn't matter if they were members of IEEE or not. And we did some things in cooperation with the IEEE. But many of the people who were members of the IEEE Computer Society were IEEE members who

picked that society as something that they had interest in. Their core membership, who I would call just computing people, was much smaller than the IEEE Computer Society's total membership, and of that, we had a good number of those people who were members of ACM. So why get involved in this competition issue when there isn't any. Elsewhere, internationally, our real competitors were the national societies.

NORBERG: Elsewhere?

DEBLASI: Yes, like the British Computer Society, or the German Computer Society, they were more competitive in our getting international members in their countries. What we had to do was respect them and work with them and try to do some joint programs to get ourselves exposed to their memberships. So this idea that we had competition was really immaterial. I mean I could say that if you're a Yankee, you hate the Mets and the Mets hate the Yankees. That's fine. But if they don't play each other, it doesn't really matter. It's kind of the same thing. So I really tried just to ignore the competition question and just go on with our program. Let's build our program and not worry too much about what they're doing. Sometimes they would do things that would just irritate the heck out of everybody. They would say something that just wasn't necessary and I would have to remind myself to stay focused.

NORBERG: Are we talking about the IEEE?

DEBLASI: Particularly the IEEE Computer Society. So what we then did, when AFIPS went away, we lost the Joint Community connection in the United States. The reason AFIPS had to go away was for us to move internationally because then it took away the issue of, "Oh there is an American organization we internationally deal with is called AFIPS." No you don't. You have to deal with us directly. And we got kind of a pseudo membership directly in IFIPS, which was the international corresponding organization that a lot of the other international computer societies belonged to. It was a strategic move, but as I said there wasn't much resistance about getting rid of AFIPS. AFIPS, first of all, only existed because they had the joint computer conference every year and when those conferences went away, there was no more money so AFIPS was without a funding source. I was part of the committee that dissolved AFIPS and ACM moved unilaterally into the international arena. We'd always had some international membership, but now we were focusing ACM as an international organization.

NORBERG: Were there any rules on the part of the IEEE Computer Society?

DEBLASI: They were always international. IEEE does have a lot of international members because of their worldwide program and standards. They start out with a big, big advantage. The IEEE has societies in every major country. So it was very easy for them to consider themselves an international organization. We began to build our international roots, capitalizing on some things that had been done long before I got here, but had not been taken advantage of prior.

Then I helped formulate a very important conference that took place in England where we brought together the computer societies of Japan, Britain, Australia, ourselves, and a few others. We had a two-day meeting in which we talked about international cooperation and the international issues of interest. That was a very important meeting because it really put us on a different keel with regard to our international reputation. We weren't dealing under the IFIPS.

These were just the major computer societies getting together and talking about international issues.

So we moved internationally and our membership into the digital world, with the development of the ACM digital libraries. In addition we wanted to expand our membership and its leadership to include the corporate world. We began with programs like the International Collegiate Programming Contest. It really began to give us a complete international flavor and a major corporate connection. Today it is held each year throughout the world.

With a strong financial base, an acceptance of a strong executive director and staff position, and by keeping a framework in which the members could formulate areas of interest (like SIGS) and feel they have programs that they can build and direct we were able to set a new direction. That became the difference between the ACM in 1989 and the ACM in 1999.

NORBERG: That sounds all very nice, and it certainly is true that ACM became a much more mature organization, but I have a couple of questions to ask. In other professional society areas in science and technology, things as far removed as the history of science and technology to aeronautical engineering, that sort of thing, the National Academy of Sciences serves as the governmental agency in the United States which funds various things in all these societies. When AFIPS disappeared, there was some concern about who would take on this role. Is that what you're telling me now, that these people in various societies and organizations were sitting around in a room and they were becoming that group with the National Academy distributed through them, they would get money for international meetings or whatever?

DEBLASI: The meeting I was talking about was the meeting of the British Computer Society, ACM, and others. That meeting had nothing to do with funding. That meeting had to do with our programs and issues that we wanted to deal with collectively. Issues like women in computing and areas of cooperation as examples.

Regarding the question of government funding, I believe the British Computer Society does get funded by their government to a degree. The ACM does not, other than we do get NSF grants. I don't know that the National Academy of Science gives the American Physics Society money, unless they're doing a study. ACM has participated in such studies directly and indirectly.

NORBERG: Yes, or they fund a particular project.

DEBLASI: Yes. Now, ACM gets funding, some of our funds would come out of government source for a particular program where NSF might support some of our conferences. I'm on another board, as an example, the COMAP Board where we get major funding from NSF for most of our projects. I don't believe we've ever got funding from a government outside of the US, except maybe when we held a conference in another country outside the US where their society and their government may have contributed. I know we get funding very often from governments through universities for the International Collegiate Programming Contest. For instance, we just recently held the ICPC in Stockholm. The Swedish government gave money through their university to help sponsor that event. So do we get money sometimes from those kinds of sources? Yes. When we go to China next year, we'll get support through their university to put on that ICPC contest.

NORBERG: No, I wasn't trying to make that point. But let me try to make myself clearer then because I think there's something here that I didn't make clear. When I think of the American Institute of Physics, which is similar to AFIPS was, these are the people who are speaking for a group of allied professional societies, and the National Academy, when they do anything about these matters involving international questions and the associations, does not want to deal with the IEEE Computer Society, ACM, the Computer History Society, and so on. They want to deal with a collective body that represents all of these. That body then has a vote on NAS programs, and the vote helps the National Academy of Sciences distribute money or nice letters with ribbons hanging on them and so on, so you can.

DEBLASI: I know what you're describing. I just don't know of one in our area other than some studies. Have you come across one?

NORBERG: No, I haven't. That's why I'm asking. It could be that by the time you came aboard at the beginning of 1990 that that had changed.

DEBLASI: AFIPS certainly wasn't doing that before we dissolved it. As I said we have been involved in studies that were done by the National Academy of Sciences through their affiliated organizations. In IT is very hard to be represented by a single group. Maybe the new czar will do something about that, but it's very hard. The other two things I just wanted to mention was ACM is known for our major awards which are clearly recognized as the premier awards in the field. Certainly, the Turing Award is considered the Nobel Prize in our field. Just like the Field's Medal is in mathematics. Secondly, we also established in this period, the ACM Fellows program, which I and several others really pushed for and felt, was essential for the statue of ACM. ACM was reluctant for many years.

NORBERG: Do you know why?

DEBLASI: I don't know. But once we got it going, it has been done extremely well. We don't have that many fellows. We went back in history and made some people fellows, people who are still alive of course. But the fellows program is a very selective one in ACM and now we have, a second recognition program directed to developers since the fellows program deal with research and other major contributions to the field.

NORBERG: Is there a set of criteria that the committee uses to select fellows?

DEBLASI: Yes.

NORBERG: That's probably a public knowledge sort of thing.

DEBLASI: The committee's members must be Fellows of the ACM and are people who have the background to evaluate the contributions.

NORBERG: Good, because that doesn't usually happen. When I was looking through some of the documents like minutes of meetings, and the change over period from Dick Hespos to you and that's where I came up with these priorities, presumably they were your priorities or they were a negotiated position with the Executive Committee. It's the first four or so that I found

were your priorities, not somebody else's. You developed these. And apparently the Executive Committee went along with it, but it got more sharply defined at the February meeting. 1989? Has to be a mistake. It must be 1990.

DEBLASI: Yes, it would have been in 1990, I was not here in February 1989. One of the first things I had to address that we have not discussed was that we were going to move the office. So I had to find new space. We did a cost analysis of different options and looked at several properties. When we decided we made our move to 1515 Broadway. Recently they moved to this location. Our offices on Broadway were quite beautiful. But they have a very nice facilities here as well.

NORBERG: What was the point of leaving there then?

DEBLASI: I think our 15-year lease was up, and the cost of renegotiating may have gotten too high and they got a better deal here.

All right, at the same time when we were going to new headquarters, we also put in all new computer systems and work stations for everyone. We tied everybody through a local area network and set the beginnings of the expansions of our MIS operations. This looks like the layout for that site (examining a document). Yes, this looks to me like it's the MIS plan from when we moved and the build out of the new facility. Joe Sullivan at the time was our head of MIS. I wish there was a date on this.

NORBERG: No, I didn't find one.

DEBLASI: Okay. This definitely was that one because we installed OS2 at that time. I'm sure they're using Windows today, but we started using the OS2 operating system. So that was probably the plan that we put together for the purpose of the move and expanding our facilities. I think you can see within a couple of years; we were making major moves in many areas. The move to the new site was not only to get us better facilities for everybody to work in, but to present us as prominent organization.

NORBERG: Where the money come from that? You said in the beginning of our discussion here that there wasn't any money.

DEBLASI: Well, when we moved over we made a great deal because we got the space for \$20 a square foot on Broadway. We got 33,000 square feet and by that time we moved we began to solidify our finances. We also got the building owners to build the space for us. We took a 15-year lease and they gave us \$2 million to build it out. So we got a great contract.

NORBERG: Okay, but you still haven't answered the question of where the money came from.

DEBLASI: Well, we used their money.

NORBERG: Their money for your lease?

DEBLASI: No, no we had enough for the rent it wasn't much more then the rent we were paying so there was no increase in costs. Let's say we were giving them \$20 a square foot and after 15 years I think it went up, \$29 or \$30..

NORBERG: How did the volunteers take to your new management structure?

DEBLASI: I got the Executive Committee and the Council to get behind it. I had very good relations with all of the volunteer leadership, with the exception of probably SIGGRAPH. That was not personal. SIGGRAPH wanted to always move in an independent direction and I always wanted to bring them back into the fold. I got good cooperation from the presidents that I served with to reinforce that. Anyway, I served with six presidents, starting with Kocher. Kocher was just finishing up as I came in; he had only six months left. Kocher had a lot of difficulty gaining the respect that was achieved by other presidents.

NORBERG: Was it just paranoia or was it real?

DEBLASI: Don't know. It seemed like there was an awful lot reluctance to get behind him as an individual. And yet, I understood clearly what he was trying to do. He was trying to change the nature of the organization. However, he wasn't an academic or a researcher or part of the inner group. He did have a professional background; he was a consultant, a practitioner. But he didn't have the stature in the community and that was the way the community looked at him. So Bryan, I think, probably understood as well as anybody some of the changes that needed to be made, but had a very hard time articulating or getting people behind him. He was a very nice guy. If you recently met him, you said you had [Yes.], he probably could tell you things he was thinking about trying to get done and some of the frustrations he probably had trying.

NORBERG: I pressed him very hard to talk about those.

DEBLASI: Having John next was very key because John had a wonderful relationship with the member and the leadership community. On what I wanted to do, John gave me full support and that made it easier to move forward. John was instrumental, because his personality and his reputation within the ACM community, in being able to move our program forward. I enjoyed my years working with John very much. Then I needed a person, besides myself who could deal with the corporate world on a first name basis. That was Gwen Bell. Now we could talk to people directly like Bill Gates and that Silicon Valley community.

NORBERG: Well, how would Gwen Bell help with that?

DEBLASI: Gwen was Gordon Bell's wife. Gordon Bell is a giant of the field. He was of course head of research and development for DEC for many years. Gwen was the head of the computer museum, and one of the things she had was this contest every year on computer trivia (Computer Bowl) which brought in some very well known people like Bill Gates and Bill Joy. These were people that were the new leaders of the field and people that were making things happening in the IT world. She was able to get us corporate support for many of our programs. So Gwen and I, with our corporate backgrounds, teamed up on making that expansion for ACM.

So where John was extremely instrumental in developing the new framework and getting it accepted. Gwen was now extremely important in expanding out into the corporate world. I was taking care of the international on my own because we didn't have that many people in that area. Then Stu Zweben became President. Let's skip Stu for a moment. Then we had Chuck House. Now Chuck was pretty much like Gwen who was external and helped in the corporate and development world. He had some contacts in the leadership at Hewlett-Packard, and Intel and helped formulate our expansion to attract developers. Then there was Barbara Simons, and Barbara's big contribution was really the fact that she was very attentive to the idea of ACM expanding in Washington and pushing a lot of the social aspects of our agenda like women in computing, the encryption issues, things of that nature. She was more of the activist getting ACM to be a little bit more active in many of these areas. I had a great relationship with all of these presidents.

Now let me go back to Stu. I had a great relationship with Stu. Stu worked very hard, as John did, at keeping the SIGs within the framework of the organization and modernizing the bylaws and procedures of the organization. I always felt that Stu did not have a very strong Executive Committee. They were good people who had been around ACM for quite some time but who were not going to forge new paths and had no external influence. I think, in Stu's administration, I probably just kept going with all our major programs. I enjoyed my work with Stu, and probably of all of these presidents, Stu understood some of the internal workings better than anyone. So in that framework it was of benefit since we were working on the major new plans for electronic publications. Stu was the one of this group of presidents that came back inside the organization as opposed to working external.

Every one of these presidents that I worked with added their strengths to the progress.. For instance, it was no use having Gwen worry about SIG alignments or things of that nature or worry about a financial issue. Gwen was our outside person. On the other hand, Stu was internal, but you had to keep Stud away from getting bogged down in details. So working with each one was different because they had different strengths and personality. I really had a wonderful group of people to work with. Every one of these presidents I felt very comfortable with. Even if we had disagreements, I believe we respected each other. Each one had certain strengths and each one had certain things that they would want to be involved in. And that's not too unusual. I've been president of societies and nonprofit and it's not unusual. You deal with issues you're interested in dealing with. Those are the presidents I worked with. As I say, John was very, very key to that early period because John quickly understood what we needed to get done and gave full support to accomplishing it.

NORBERG: You mentioned a few minutes ago that one of the conditions that you gave for taking the job was running the organization. You were going to be the person everybody would come to for issues involved with ACM. Now, that's unusual.

DEBLASI: What I said to them was that as far as running the headquarters and staff that was my responsibility and I didn't want any interference regarding personnel. I didn't want other people running the staff. And then I said, "In running the organization, don't take me if you want somebody who's going just internal because I'm going outside to represent the organization." So that was the framework of that comment. In other words, I know executive directors who were hired, but stayed in the office. If they wanted someone who's going to be a spokesman for the organization and go represent the organization then I was the right person. I told them at the time, "You'll just stifle me to the point that I'll get exasperated because I can't

do what needs to be done, or I'll move out front on you and you won't be happy." I said, "I think you'll find that I'm mature enough as an executive to know to keep you involved in what we're doing and develop a consensus about what we're going to do, but I'm going to be representing you. If I want to go talk to the Computer Society, I'm not going ask for permission but you will know why and you will be part of the dialog."

NORBERG: That's what I wanted to say next. Did the Executive Committee believe that they needed to endorse what you did beforehand? Did they give you any argument after hand?

DEBLASI: No. The Executive Committee became very comfortable that they were informed to the degree they needed to be informed, and that I had a good understanding as to when to bring them into the dialog and when not to bring them into it. At the same time, I had great cooperation. If the president was going to go out and do something, they would often call me and make sure I was informed. I don't remember once where an issue came up where they would have turned to me and said, "Gee, we hope you haven't done that". They were confident in my representing them. I could go to meetings representing the organization fully confident of their support.

NORBERG: Who gave you the most trouble in terms of organizations, not necessarily personalities?

DEBLASI: I think the SIGs, particularly SIGGRAPH. They were the hardest challenge to keep in the fold,. But again, you've got to remember, they were a premier part of the organization. This is like being the commissioner of baseball and dealing with the Yankees. We had to keep them within the framework of the organization without interfering with their program.

NORBERG: Did you observe any faltering SIG? Not doing anything, they weren't very good, and so on.

DEBLASI: Yes, we had some SIGs that we actually put out of business because their program was just not good enough to sustain them.

NORBERG: And how was that done?

DEBLASI: The SIG Board would actually hold a review, and the staff would advise them regarding their sustainability. Of course as some SIGs were closed other SIGs were developed.

Not all SIGs were equal; four SIGs were at the heart of the SIG program in both financial size and membership. These were SIGGRAPH, SIGCHI, DEC, and SIGPLAN (programming languages). As I said, the key thing was to allow them to manage their programs but to do it in a business-like way. To make sure they followed business-like rules in running their conferences and programs. That is why we put the headquarters SIG organization in place. The director of the SIG department dealt with the SIG Board and individual staff members worked with the individual SIGs, and would be involved with the SIG leadership and their Executive Committee attending their meetings and conferences.

So we had representation out there in all these activities involved in the business aspects of the SIG operations. We never tried to run their program. That was the key as I explained to the staff. I said, "The program belongs to the volunteers, we are involved in the business

management. We were not going to go tell SIGGRAPH, “At your next conference, display this technology. If we did that, then we would be taking on program responsibilities, which wasn’t our purpose nor were we capable of doing it. It was a fine line to maintain, but it’s was a clear line. Now if they have a program they want to do and it was going to cost more money than they had then we had to get involved which is not dictating the program but evaluating the financial support for the program.

In some of the conferences like DEC, the SIG would have a professional conference organization that would manage the conference. We would meet with that group to make sure that the services being supplied met all our business interests. But we didn’t get involved in the program decisions because, first of all, I didn’t have the staff who knew every program. Now, the other thing was to be sure the staffers kept both hats on. The toughest staff position at ACM was to be the representative to the SIG because you have to keep two keep a balance between the SIG’s interests and you ACM responsibilities.

NORBERG: Who was that during your term?

DEBLASI: Well, the head of that now is Donna; Peggy was the first one.

NORBERG: Did they do an effective job?

DEBLASI: Yes, both of them did, and often they represented their constituents internally. That was fine and I wanted that.

NORBERG: Well, all this sounds very nice and rosy.

DEBLASI: You want something bad?

NORBERG: Well, I don’t want something bad necessarily.

DEBLASI: Because you’re not going to get it.

NORBERG: You ran down the list of presidents, and now that I know several of them, I can agree with what you are saying because they told me the same thing. But what about the staff? You haven’t mentioned very much about the staff, what their capabilities were coming into the office and how they were to work with? And secondly, whether they had any difficulties, and how did those get resolved?

DEBLASI: Well, I’ll talk a little bit about each of the key people. I’ll start out with the head of publications, which was Mark Mandelbaum, who is no longer here. Publications are a major part of the organization and one of the three major revenue sources. Publications, conferences, and membership are the three main business areas. Most conferences are the SIG events.

Mark required my help to manage his area for a couple of reasons. First, he was in one of the areas where we were making major new advances in particular the digital library. Mark knew the development and publishing of publications very well, but we had to stay involved with the financial aspects. Mark had some very strong people with him, which helped Bernie and Diane. They were very good at publishing their products and managing their area of responsibility. Bernie was the key in formulating and developing the digital library. If I have to

look at the key people here, I would say that Mark was one that worked with, me, Pat and the financial people to make sure that the financial aspects were under controlled. Mark also knew all the players involved, and Mark would never get you into a problem as far as his interface with people like Peter Denning, who was the key volunteer leader in the publication area and digital library.

In the SIG area, Peggy was here for a very short time. She was only here for a couple of years and then she retired. She was very strong-minded, which was excellent from my viewpoint. It probably drove Pat up the wall sometimes, because she'd bypass everyone and come directly to me. So her personality would sometimes cause some clashes, but she was excellent for the initially formulating what we wanted to do. I like strong people like Peggy and Pat, so that was fine with me.

Donna, who came in after her, was excellent she was much lower keyed, a different personality, and basically took away some of the friction with the SIGs because of her personality.

Then we had Jim Adams (Mr. ACM) headed the membership area. Now, Jim probably knew the active membership and leadership better than anyone in the organization. When I decided to make a decision about the deputy executive director position Jim and Pat were the two people that I considered. Jim was the more senior person and the person that was better known in the community. I think Jim was probably disappointed initially that I didn't select him. But Jim was one of the most likeable people in the world. If he was disappointed—I'm sure he was to a degree—you never saw it manifest in our relationship, because we became very good friends, and had a great business relationship. Jim was excellent because he knew our volunteer community. He knew the membership community. For many years, he was really the focal point for a lot of the social interface in the organization. When Jim retired, the question of who was going to take his place was a big one on my mind. I took the logical step and selected Lillian Israel. Lillian was an outstanding writer and idea developer and excellent in developing marketing programs.

She was a person who had a tremendous dedication to ACM. She was like Pat in that respect. I can't say that I always agreed with her ideas and it was not unusual for me to try guiding her to modify some of the ideas. I don't think she was happy when I didn't agree. But I think she did an outstanding job and it was a good choice. Some times when people are very committed they find it hard to manage people without the same commitment. Her forte was the ideas and programs, so I had to put some other people underneath her to do some of direct personnel management. We had a professional PR position which reported directly to me.

We also had another position that really reported directly to me to help develop our international programs, and that was Fred Aronson who was excellent and someone I had great personal and professional respect for because of his commitment and outstanding work.

Looking at our IT people, we started out with Joe Sullivan, who did an outstanding job of getting our new IT infrastructure, equipment and software installed. Joe was a mainframe person and we were moving to a client server infrastructure. Joe realized this and decided to take his career into other directions. We were extremely fortunate to have Wayne who we knew was going to be the person who would really run that area long term. Wayne became the head of IT. He was outstanding, he had a strong understanding of the technology and the ability to work with the staff and volunteers to develop and advance our systems and applications. Our progression into the digital world could not have been achieved without Wayne.

Finance, which is presently managed by Russell, was obviously involved in all areas. Russell was always the key financial planning and tracking person in finance and the one I relied

on for financial planning and forecasting. When I was here Michael was the head of Finance, and provided a very stable financial system. Michael was a individual who would never get you into financial trouble. If you want to be sure you're running a sound financial organization with someone wasn't going to get you into trouble, Michael was the person you wanted. So these were the key financial people.

As I previously noted we organized with, Finances, IT and Administration reporting to Pat because they were the service staffs, while the key mission staffs reported to me. We had monthly financial review meetings and periodic planning meetings in which we would meet offline for half a day and examine our programs and performance. If a staff head wanted to do something or had an issue all the staff heads had an input. I had the advantage of everyone's ideas. I think, this approach served us very, very well in keeping everybody well informed about our programs and direction. Twice a year, we'd go away to an offsite location for a day or two and have a long term planning sessions.

NORBERG: When you were coming in November of 1989, a major new strategic planning document had been prepared, ran 75-80 pages I guess. It strikes me, looking at it, it's not really a tactical plan. It is a strategic plan, but you need to build out from each of these areas that are identified as needing attention, like public awareness. And I don't see that the people who were on those various subcommittees that generated these documents were really capable of doing it. Do you remember your reaction to the report?

DEBLASI: I don't remember the report. That doesn't mean there wasn't one just mean I didn't see it. I just don't remember that report. A couple of times much later on we had strategic planning meetings with the Council to get their ideas and priorities on subjects such as increasing our membership in developers and corporate members. The one you're talking about, would have been done prior to when I was here. I would doubt that I saw it, I certainly have no recollection of it or anything happening from it.

NORBERG: Where your name shows up is who is going to do the cost analysis, and what kind of analysis is going to be done for the Washington initiative, and so on. Very interesting. Personally, I have some doubts about the people that were doing that report.

DEBLASI: Do you know the names?

NORBERG: Walter Carlson.

DEBLASI: Oh, Walter. Walter and I were compatriots at IBM so I knew Walter for a lot of years. Walter was a person who got involved in the ACM, and was actively involved, and would often get involved in things, like what you're describing, with good intentions. Very often some of those ideas would be adapted. Walter, at that time, was pretty much out of things except for his involvement with ACM, so I suspect he put some time and effort into some things before I got here. In fact he was one of the first people that greeted me when I came on board, but as I say, we knew each other prior. So Walter being involved in something like that does not surprise me. The way the Council used to work, they'd run off and do these kinds of things. I think Walter was probably a member of Council at that time; I'm not sure.

NORBERG: Lynn Shaw, Frank Friedman, Dale Galbreth [?]....

DEBLASI: Frank was another person that was very active. Frank and I worked very closely after I met him at ACM. He was very involved in the publication area, but also involved in the membership area. Lynn Shaw was another active member. These were all well-known people in the association at that time. Some of them faded away. Frank was involved for a long period of time when I was here. Dale was involved for a long period of time. Both of them, Dale and Frank, headed up the Membership Committee. Bill Edwards I'd have to tell you I don't know. Peter Denning, of course is still very active in ACM publications, Peter and I became close associates at ACM.

NORBERG: Kocher tried to take the credit for this. I don't know whether it's true or not.

DEBLASI: He may have. It was done under his watch.

NORBERG: Yes it was. And he claimed there was some evidence for this in the file. He claimed he had asked what was then the Long-term Planning Committee to take on this new task, and then it was renamed the Strategic Planning Committee.

DEBLASI: Have you seen Walter? Walter faded out from involvement in ACM to a large degree during John's administration. He was very active at the beginning of John's administration, and then John and he didn't quite see eye to eye on some things and he faded out at that point in time and he wasn't as active as he previously had been. Frank Friedman, Dale and some of these others stayed active for the years I was here.

NORBERG: Well, he found some new interests at that point too.

DEBLASI: Babbage Foundation was one thing I believe he was involved in.

NORBERG: Yes. And he wasn't my favorite person on that board, but I wasn't trying to run the board membership. I was running the board administratively, because there were too many people speaking for the place. It sounds like ACM, but a lot smaller base.

DEBLASI: I know what you mean. Well, Walter was a great idea man, and he was enthusiastic about what he did. But once he started in a direction, getting Walter to accommodate other ideas sometimes wasn't easy. Now, I had no problem with Walter. I didn't work that closely with him here. He was kind of, as I say, transitioning at the time that I came on board, as were a number of these people, Lyn Shaw and some of the others. As years went on, they were not as involved as they once were.

NORBERG: So those people turned out not to want to carry this report through?

DEBLASI: I don't know, because the report was never put to me. As I say, I don't recall having read it. I suspect that Bryan would point to that and say that's a strategic direction document. I can understand why he would feel that way.

NORBERG: Well, I brought it up to him and we went over the various issue areas that were covered in the strategic file report.

DEBLASI: Did you show that to John?

NORBERG: I did, yesterday.

DEBLASI: Did John recall?

NORBERG: Let's see. What did John say about it? He knew about it. He already had some ideas that he wanted to work out himself as president, and so he didn't see how this was going to do the association very much good. And so he didn't follow through with it either. And then he talked about you and your ideas and the way you handled the situation and he thought that strategic plan report didn't need to see the light of day again. So he didn't say that, but his statement was strong enough that that's exactly what he meant.

All right, well I picked out a number of general issues and initiatives during the 1990s starting in 1988 or 1989. We've just talked about the strategic planning. And MIS planning we talked about and that was one of these as far as the Executive Committee was concerned, they turned it over to you, so that's why I was trying to find out whether that report was yours or not.

One of the issues that arose is that the association was looked upon by volunteer members as in a state of stagnation by the end of the 1980s, 1988, and that something ought to be done. And it appears in letters to the CACM, it appears in statements to the board of the Council. And the people that I have talked to who are beyond that period said, "Oh yes, that was a period of stagnation. The association wasn't going anywhere. We didn't know what our members wanted. The various surveys that we were doing..." The major contributor to that was either ineffective executive directors—this would go back to Weinstein, too—that all they would do is say, "Well, it can't be done," or "Dogs don't like the dog food," as Hespos used to say all the time, I understand. And it was ineffectual handling of boards by the people who were responsible for them. And there was this undercurrent of money and where the money was coming from and where it was going and who had charge of it, all of that. Basically, I don't see that one could argue with that the association was in stagnation. When I brought that up to Stu two weeks ago, he said that he was too busy dealing with the SIG Board and the education committee and some of the plans that were being developed for changing the public awareness by improving the curriculum materials that were to be given out as the Accreditation Board was enjoined in those years. So it looks to me that there is a definite shift in management capability and in the attitude of these new managers that something had to be done for the association. And we set out to do it. That seem reasonable to you?

DEBLASI: Yes. I mean, what you're describing to me is what I was told. It points out what they wanted to change. They wanted new dynamics for the organization, and it manifested itself in these ideas of, becoming more international, increasing our membership and updating our publications, which they felt were pretty stagnant. I'll give you an example:

One major thing that was done very early in the '90s was changing CACM—we changed it from one type of publication to another. There was considerable reactions to that from the academic and research community. Some thought it was a forward move and long overdue. The development community felt it was a positive change. Yet you had the academic community saying, "I won't publish in CACM anymore. I can't get tenure credits publishing in this new journal." So every time you did something in ACM, you got reactions to it. You had to be sensitive to both because both to a degree had a valid viewpoint. Now, the area of publications

was probably where the most sensitivity was, because publications were looked upon as traditional publications and as an important area of publishing to gain tenure and reputation. So the academic community view of publications was much different than some other areas in the computing field. We tried to expand the publications to service more than just the academic community. But the change to CACM as an example was a classic reaction. Now CACM has recently changed again. The updating of the CACM is very important because it is the one publication everyone gets.

But going back to your main point, yes, I would say they had reached a point as an association where one could view the organization as becoming stagnant. There were a number of views. One view was that the organization's meaningfulness was diminishing and needed to be broadened. Another was that maybe we ought to have the organization directed at only the academic and research community. We said that our membership was 70/30, the 30 being academic and research, but our leadership 70/30 the other way. . We had to expand the value of the organization to all communities. But that could not be done unless we put the organization on a better foundation: its management, its finances, and its ability to change and move forward. And all of those things were important to achieve in my first few years at ACM.

You asked about Stu Zweben. I believe he was very involved in the '80s with these issues. Stu was involved in publications, membership and education. That's probably where Stu devoted his time.

NORBERG: Well, he was chairman of the SIG Board at one point. In '87, I believe.

DEBLASI: In '87? Not being here I may have missed that.

NORBERG: I also read the Computer-Human Interaction SIG. He was on that one as well. And he was on a number of other things at the same time, both at his university as well as in Washington, other groups that had nothing to do with computing, but a lot to do with education in science and technology. So he was, in fact he still is, all over the place. He just loves being involved.

DEBLASI: He's a great guy to have involved because he contributes. He's a good man for all the ACM functions. That's why he understood the internal workings of ACM. I just don't remember him in the SIG area. I'm glad you reminded me that he was involved. Each of these boards, Publication Board, SIG Board, Membership Board, and a couple of the other boards that we have, I used to attend those board meetings regularly. But I let the Director of SIG Services play the lead role with the SIG Board. I did that purposely.

NORBERG: Why?

DEBLASI: Because the SIGs were the most sensitive about being managed. It was the area, don't forget, where the majority of what they did, they did as volunteers. The other boards all did things with the staff being the working group. I periodically attend the SIG Board with the president. As I said, I did that purposely. I allowed our staff head to attend their meetings, which always gave me the opportunity, if something didn't work out to have the opportunity to get involved."

NORBERG: That's funny.

DEBLASI: Yes, that's a fine line, and I hope it doesn't sound like I was planning to have competition. It was the best way I thought of working, keeping them in charge of their area and still being able to provide an executive overview. The publications area was different. I actually was part of the conversation at their board meetings, and talked about direction, costs and staff resources. I would often say we can't do it right now but we can plan for it. We addressed new publications, financial viability and how do to evaluate the success of a publication. Of course one of my key involvements with the Pubs Board was the development of the entire plan for electronic publishing, which was a brand new endeavor.

So we interfaced with each of these boards differently. In most of the boards, there was heavy support for staff guidance and involvement. Whereas the SIGs was a more heavily volunteer driven particularly in the conferences but the staff overviewed all of those activities and was involved from the overall business management perspective.

NORBERG: So they're not hiring people. They didn't need to, probably.

DEBLASI: Right.

NORBERG: Did the management committee of ACM function in a way analogous to a management committee on a board of directors of a corporation?

DEBLASI: Soon after I came we got rid of the management committee and the finance committee and put all that responsibility under the Executive Committee and executive staff.

NORBERG: I see. And that was your responsibility at that point. We skirted around the issue of women in computing, probably one of the most prominent areas in public awareness, but the one of least interest to many of the members of the association.

DEBLASI: On the issue of women in computing, ACM was always at the forefront of identifying it as an important issue.

NORBERG: What was done about it?

DEBLASI: We made it a priority within ACM. We emphasized getting women into leadership roles and publishing articles in CACM. Our people did get involved with the Computer Research Association that was in Washington, DC, most of whose members belonged to ACM, in formulating the Grace Hopper Celebration of Women in Computing. And we had two or three people from the leadership of ACM that were instrumental in developing this very successful conference. Barbara Simons, an ACM President, was one of them. So ACM did as much as we could to support a number of activities including a mentoring program. Forming a mentoring program takes a pretty big effort, and I am not sure how successful it was. I don't know how to evaluate our efforts but you could definitely say that ACM and its leadership have always been very conscious about this being an important issue that had to be addressed.

NORBERG: Well, I take issue with that, certainly, because if you think it's an important issue, you would think that more would be done to help make it an un-issue.

DEBLASI: Fine but the first step is to recognize the problem and within your own sphere do as much as you can. Now, once you ask yourself “what can I do,” you find out there are limitations but that you try address through special and directed programs. The time I was in ACM, I think we had something like 12% of women in computing. I don’t know what the percentage is today. I think we had a similar percentage of PhDs being given to women in computing. I look at the field today; it’s still a very male dominated field. But I can look at any engineering or scientific field and find that to be true. The key is to keep working at it.

NORBERG: It’s still the same. Yes.

DEBLASI: So I don’t know how long we go around this thing and keep coming back to the same point, both on an historical basis and a practical basis the role of women in computing should be expanded not because they are women but because their contributions are needed. The efforts to do that I don’t think start at organizations like the ACM. I think it’s got to start within our education system. What organizations like ACM can do is to make sure there are no artificial barriers preventing it.

NORBERG: I think the women are also voting with their feet rather than with their mind. More than 50% of the students in law programs are women. Medicine has gone up to something like 40% (the last number I saw). And there’s a lot of technology in both of those areas, so.

DEBLASI: It’s got nothing to do with right-brain, left-brain type thing. It’s got to do with whether or not you can find something attractive that will draw women to it. But unless you started at the grade school level you will not change things. I don’t think you started up here. It’s got to start at the root level. And still, as you say, women have expanded in the field over the past 50 years. Why? Because the field has become more dynamic and inclusive. I wish we had more television programs showing women in computing and less as lawyers. I mean, every time I see a judge on TV it’s a woman judge. That’s not realistic either but it makes an impression.

NORBERG: What would you say to someone about the portrayal of women in computing in that television series that ACM was heavily involved in?

DEBLASI: We did. The early installments showed them as programmers. Grace Hopper was shown in that series. But even when you show the women as stars, you still have to show what’s real. I mean, the ENIAC computer was mainly programmed by women. Now does a woman make a better programmer than a man, or vice versa? I can tell you, I work with a good number of people who are programmers who come from India. They are very good programming. Now, why do they do good programming? The reason is they are trained in their culture and schooling to follow rules and procedures. And their whole education system teaches them to follow the rules very, very carefully, and they get that discipline. So programming is a set of rules, its syntax as well as some creative capabilities. So they’re very good programmers. Now, translate that the other way. I don’t think a man or a woman is a better programmer, but I do know that women do a more thorough job in programming. So what happens we tie women to be programmers. But that’s not really where the leadership is. We need women to design systems, manage development programs and implement systems, and that’s where you don’t see enough of them. My technical background is large scale systems design. That’s where you really want

the advancement of women. I don't want them tied to doing clerical type programming. We need them in the large scale application and systems design area.

NORBERG: Well, don't you think that there are such women out there, starting some of the smaller companies where they're really just getting started and they might be working on a thinking machine or a new device?

DEBLASI: Yes there are some, but then they disappear from the scene. They go away. And I don't know where they're going. It was an issue in the '90s and is an issue today and will be tomorrow. If you want it to be a non-issue then you need a multi-phase program starting with education, awareness, mentoring, incentives and commitment. But don't address it as just a good thing to do because it's politically correct but because it is economically, socially and competitively imperative.

NORBERG: It's still an issue.

DEBLASI: And it has not gotten better. In fact, I think it's going the other way.

NORBERG: At the University of Minnesota, there were summer programs for young women in 6th grade to whatever, and they would come one summer and then you wouldn't see them again. They wouldn't come back for a repeat, even though the faculty would design new problems to do and new things to work on. I don't know. Well, I want to go back to CRA, both its organizational structure and its effectiveness from the point of view of ACM in the Washington center.

DEBLASI: Right. First of all, there was a great deal of cross-pollination between the two organizations. Many leadership members of ACM were leadership members of CRA, and vice versa. We always kept a very good cooperative arrangement between the two organizations. One of the big differences between the two organization (besides CRA didn't go into publications, it was really concentrating on the issues of computer research in Washington and the government's involvement and other things of that nature) it was a Washington presence. They knew Washington. They lived in the Washington environment. I won't say they were lobbyists, but they did things that were interconnected with issues that were being done up on the Hill dealing with computing research. When we wanted to do something in Washington, we very often consulted with them and they gave us contacts, and then they would very often join us on issues. That was before we began with the idea of getting our own staffing Washington as we have today. I respect Barbara Simons and some of the others who really pushed to make that happen, they were very intent ACM having a voice in Washington. We also worked closely with a group that has to do with the privacy area. We worked with Marc Rotenberg of EPIC and they represented us in Washington for a while.

But CRA was always an organization we worked well with and got great cooperation on related issues. I remember attending their board meetings along with our president. It was a good organization. It did some important things for the field. There was never a conflict situation with CRA. As I say, they kind of expanded our capabilities into Washington.

NORBERG: Stuart is still on the board.

DEBLASI: Yes, I expect that Stu would be.

NORBERG: Well, I want you to summarize one thing before we leave it, and that is how effective was ACM in giving its members what they wanted? How effective was ACM in getting its message out to other people who were not members of ACM and may not be interested in computing issues, but you have to try to reach them because this is a computer world we live in?

DEBLASI: Are you talking about just issues or are you talking about computing information?

NORBERG: Well, I think I was just talking about issues at that point, but you raise an interesting question, asking about the machinery and the way people understand what's going on. Can we leave that and just go to the other idea first.

DEBLASI: Well, the CACM is the major vehicle we have to communicate with our constituency. Then, of course, as we expanded the nature of the website and some of our ability by email, we had two additional vehicles available to communicate with our members and the computing community. So from the time that I first came to ACM to now, we have made major strides in communicating with the members of ACM and the IT community. As to whether or not we're using that to effectively address issues I can tell you that as I left, we were progressing, particularly in CACM, by talking about issues like women in computing, and our president's letters, and some of the risk articles that we did. We were also talking about the legal aspects of electronic publishing. So a lot of those things we are getting out to our members in CACM. In addition to that, of course you had the SIG areas dealt with issues within their own individual fields, very often at their conferences.

Now, the other aspects of how effective we might be, that's kind of in the eye of the beholder. I don't know how you measure that. I get CACM. I scan through some of the things that I'm interested in. If an issue comes up, I may just glance at it or it could make me take action. It might be of significant or of timely interest. So when it comes to issues, and we are trying to get a ground swell of reaction you're have to do something overt to make that happen. You can do that by holding a conference; or publishing information; or solicit the views of the membership and using that information to effectively deal with that issue. Do we do very much of that? I think we can do it more effectively.

Now, during my tenure we started USACM. USACM was for the purpose of dealing with issues. We had a big group that was the USACM committee. They would define or select issues and try to formulate or foster a position for ACM. There were often different views. The encryption question is an example. When the government wanted to come out with their encryption chip, we had two different views and we had two women who were on opposite sides. You had Barbara Simons along with Mark Rosenberg who weretotally against it. And then you had Dorothy Denning, whose position was completely opposite. I mean a debate between Mark, Barbara and Dorothy would have made great television. That was a primary issue around the middle of the nineties as to whether the government should put out a computer chip for national security reasons.

NORBERG: Now, let me get this straight. Denning was on the side of...?

DEBLASI: Dorothy Denning often voiced her support for the government position. Mark and Barbara Simons were on the side and said that idea was wrong. You can go back to CACM and probably read some of their comments.

The other thing is the members. ACM is a very hard organization in which obtain just one viewpoint. We have a lot of free thinkers in ACM, and they're not always going to be on the same page. Even on technology issue. You get three people concerned about an issue and you'll get six views. Just look at the comments in CACM's Forum sometime. Somebody will publish something in CACM and you'll have four or five challenging comments, all from very knowledgeable people. Now, very often those comments are proving ideas or saying when the limitations of an idea must be considered. It's very hard to take a group-- we now have 90,000 members -- and not expect a difference of opinion. The challenge is how do you take a position on an issue that you're sure represents the vast majority of the organization?

NORBERG: I don't think you can.

DEBLASI: It's very hard. That's why it's hard for all organizations like us to deal with non-technical issues.

NORBERG: Well, Jean Sammet's opinion about the bank concerns in the '70s was that associations should not do it at all. If you can't speak for all the members, you should speak for no one.

DEBLASI: That's right. And that really was still the primary view during the time that I was here. I agreed with it. But we pushed the envelope some, because there were some things upon which you could coalesce and the vast majority of the community.

NORBERG: Well, that may mean that the issue is not very important on a relative scale.

DEBLASI: No not necessarily. It could mean that you can address the issue with a broad enough position to get support like the women in computing issue.

NORBERG: Were you ever at contentious meetings of the Executive Committee or Council?

DEBLASI: When I came on board, I heard about some of the gyration at Council meetings—people would get mad and throw things in the middle of the floor and so on and so forth, but I never saw that. Did I see strong discussions on issues at Council meetings? Yes. Did I see strong discussions at the committee meetings? Yes. But I never saw something that got out of the realm of a business environment. Sometimes, once in a while, there were personality hits. But you make allowances for that, because that's going to happen. First of all, I wouldn't allow confrontations to go on too long. If it was something that was really a problem, we would just get it offline and find a way out of it. But I heard stories that would raise the hair on your head. I heard Paul Abrahams and Adele Goldberg disagreements were classics. I often wondered, maybe I missed all the fun."

NORBERG: When I wanted to interview Adele Goldberg, I sent her a copy of the interview I had done with Paul, and David Brandin sent me a message in response to one that I sent him. He said, "No matter what you send her, don't have Paul's name connected with it." Too late now!

DEBLASI: I know when you interviewed Dave he raised one subject that I really prefer not to go into, and it has to do with the aborted selection of my replacement as executive director. The reason I mention it is because others may have mentioned it and I prefer not to go into it. It was something that Dave was involved in and probably came away with some very strong personal views about it. It was the only time in my tenure that the ACM did something that in my opinion would not go down as one of its shining moments.

NORBERG: Of course, yes. Okay. Could you review for me the way in which an annual budget was developed?

DEBLASI: Our budget process started with Russell putting together the first draft of the budget, and he would base it on the previous budget with the anticipation of the new programs or expansions. We would go over it with each of the department heads. We would look at what the expectations were for the conferences and we would make some judgment on the outlook for the conference. We would stay very conservative, as we went through the process and budget assumptions. I would then run it through my private model that I had in which I would do a forecast of each revenue and expense parameter. I built the model when I got here to help me understand the financial structure. From these discussions, we would come to an agreement on a budget.

We would then have monthly reviews of all the major budget items as we went through the year. We would further refine our projections as we got actual expenditure numbers from the first and second quarters. Then we would probably go monthly through the third quarter which pretty much fixed our year-end projection. By September, we would pretty much know how the year would end. That would allow us at that point in time to know any advanced spending we wanted to do or any reserves we wanted to put in place for the following year. We were already working on the following year's budget at the time. So we had what I would call a very practical budgetary process. In publications as an example, we always kept track of the cost of paper because we knew that that would impact our publication budget in a given year and what would happen with the printer's costs. Sometimes we would do advance payments on paper when we thought the paper prices were going up and try to get our printers to do some advance work with us. Other times, we would pull things. We would simply say, "We are not going to do this next year. We're going to do something else instead, or we're going to start out very carefully in the first quarter and see what happens. It was an ongoing process and carried from present to future budgets.

NORBERG: Isn't this starting with your term and going forward?

DEBLASI: Yes.

NORBERG: Because I've been talking to Dick about finances. I was trying to find out where the initial projections had come from, and he wasn't quite so forthcoming.

DEBLASI: I don't what was done before I was here but I know what I put in place helped get us financially sound. Don't forget I was head of revenue planning at IBM, so I knew the budgetary process, and I knew as an executive what had to be done. I put that discipline in place early and I would suspect that process is still being used today in one version or another.

NORBERG: If they keep track of it the way you describe it, it makes it easier to budget.

DEBLASI: By June, for example, we would know what was going to happen with the SIGGRAPH and CHI, conferences. Now if those conferences came in very bad, we would have to make adjustments for the remaining six months. So if you've got your DEC, CHI, and SIGGRAPH input by midyear, it worked out well because you could see if a large segment of the conference revenue and were able to project where the underlying SIG budgets would end up.

NORBERG: Was this done on a calendar year?

DEBLASI: Financially, ACM is on a calendar year.

NORBERG: When you're talking about the conferences, that's the first thing that popped into my mind: conferences can't be on a fiscal basis.

DEBLASI: No, we are on a calendar year and all revenue and expense had to be reported on a calendar year. If a conference took place in a given calendar year it was financially reported in that year.

NORBERG: I'll now leave computer science education training until after your lunch.

DEBLASI: Okay. I've got to go to lunch with some of the staff. This, by the way, is the summary presentation I made as I left. I gave you a copy. These are the charts. I'm sorry that the charts are not in color, if they were in color...you would have everything just like a graph going up. But don't worry about it. Just take it.

NORBERG: All right, I'll do that while you're gone.

[Lunch break]

DEBLASI: The major push for the digital library initiative and its initial concept was staff driven, with support from the volunteer community, particularly the Publications Board. Everybody looked at it and agreed, "Yes, this is the direction we want to go." In a major presentation I made to the Pubs Board, Executive Committee and Council final approval was obtained and we moved forward.

NORBERG: Why did they feel the desire for this?

DEBLASI: Well, because the idea of digital publishing was beginning to formulate in the outside publishing world, and we began to get capabilities through the Internet, which was developing at the same time, of being able to distribute publications. So it picked up momentum as a strategic direction. We developed the business model. That was one initiative that was very staff-oriented, and we presented the business model to the... and they looked at a mock up of the Digital Library and eventually the whole thing was accepted including the necessary budget.

NORBERG: Was there already a body of materials in digital form that you could modify and put up online quickly?

DEBLASI: No, because initially one of the big parts of the program which later on became secondary was to get to where we could do editing and everything online and move it into DL. To speed the program up, and get this whole process going, we began to make PDF copies of everything we had in our library going back initially ten then twenty years. We sent it all, I think, to Korea or somewhere and had copies made of everything, and we began to put into the DL. We kept adding to it. The first goal was the first ten years. And now I think they've got well beyond twenty years.

The thing about our initial plan was we wanted to do the entire process from submission of articles to editing to print and digital publication with one system. We put a major effort in that, but we never could quite get it to work the way we wanted. What we did was, we took a more practical approach and built into the system the capability get a PDF of the final versions from the print process for the DL but incorporate doing inline editing sub-system. So we took a hybrid of approach of our original idea and got it done.

I will tell you that the heads of Publication Board were very much behind us, particularly Peter Denning. He was chairman of the Publication Board at the time. There were two big issues with electronic publications beyond the financial and technical. One had to do with the organization of the electronic publishing database and the interface with the user community, which our IT and publications people addressed. The other piece had to do with the whole issues of copyright protection and authors use, Peter worked a great deal on that issue so that we had a good set of principles. Because one of the things was, let's say you're a contributor and you're going to contribute your article to us. We're going to have electronic files and we're going to hold the copyright. Does that mean that if you have a copy in your file, then you as a professor can't put that out or combine that material with new material? As you can see we had to develop some new ideas and principles.

NORBERG: The answer is no?

DEBLASI: The answer is actually yes with some restrictions. We came up with the principle that the author had certain rights in the new electronic publishing world. You couldn't publish it, but you certainly could use it and recombine it with other things for another publication. So there were all those principles that had to be worked out. The whole publication policy issue had to be worked out. I worked with Peter and the Board on these issues. Then we had some legal people look at it. That was an important part of getting this all established. We broke some new ground with the DL.

NORBERG: Was the establishment of a Legal Issues Committee part of that?

DEBLASI: No. We actually did include the Pubs Board. And we always had our legal firm that looked at any issue. But we had a lot of people writing about things. Samuels, as an example, wrote on a number of these issues in CACM about electronic publishing.

NORBERG: Was there money put up by ACM?

DEBLASI: Yes.

NORBERG: Because this is a time when the National Science Foundation was putting a digital library together.

DEBLASI: I don't remember NSF or other sources funding our efforts. There may have been some sub-projects in the committee, but I don't remember that being the case. A link for electronic publishing is on the web site.

NORBERG: Well, there are some other financial aspects I wanted to explore with you. One of them is that many professional organizations whose membership is mostly academic people face a financial crisis of one form or another, sometimes every year, and they can't seem to get out of that mold. So were there any special challenges that you had to deal with in this respect?

DEBLASI: Well, first of all, I was surprised when I got here that we did pay for so many things that had to do with people attending meetings and functions. And that was a transition for me. In the academic community, when they participated as volunteers in ACM activities, they expected to have their expenses covered by somebody. Whether that's working on a conference or making a presentation at a conference or in some kind of professional activity, their expenses will be re-reimbursed. If they served on SIGGRAPH committee and attend meetings, they're expenses were going to be taken care of. I had been used to the corporate world where your expenses were paid by your company. So I was surprised at the scope of it. I quickly got an understanding and appreciation for it. I also quickly appreciated that it was very much an academic community orientation that fostered this approach. Less so with the development people but, still, they took advantage of it as well. It certainly continued throughout my tenure. It was expensive, but we planned for it. I am invited and attended, as an example, the ICPC event each year. My expenses are covered. As you said, this is fairly traditional in most of these types of organizations, particularly ones like ACM. Now this did not cover members or non-members who attended conferences but did cover the volunteers who worked at the conferences.

NORBERG: That was not the financial crisis I was thinking of, though it would contribute to a financial crisis if too many of these things were being paid for. No, I was thinking about a larger issue. Say it's three years since you raised the dues for members. This is a particularly bad year for conferences, 2001; you don't have much money or whatever. And costs are going up because inflation has hit. That's the kind of financial crisis I'm interested in.

DEBLASI: We hit such times. We had times when we got a drop in conference attendance, membership or publication sales because of the economic conditions. This is why you need a certain amount of funds in the bank so you can carry yourself over these periods. Let's use a conference as an example. A SIG conference last year made two million dollars—arbitrary number. When they plan the next year's conference and we examine that conference, we make sure they take into consideration to be conservative on their attendance expectations, the amount they're going to get on exhibits, and expenses. You don't automatically plan that you're going to make two million dollars again, nor do you plan that you're going to make four million dollars. You've got to plan it in a realistic framework. We tried to insist on realistic and good planning. But the idea was to try to build fund balances to carry you through periods where something unexpected could happen.

Conferences were the most critical area. That's the one you could get hit immediately on. Membership and publications were much different. Even if you've got a drop off in membership, by the time it'd catch up with you, you'd know what was going to happen. So the conferences were the most critical from year to year as an impact on revenue. It is very similar if you look at IBM, in the days when I involved in revenue planning. The lease revenue could be planned to the dollar; the purchase revenue was much more difficult to predict and would vary from year to year. Of all of the revenue that came in from membership, publications, conferences and some of the other areas the conferences required the most critical planning. You had to try to figure out from year to year what might happen. I mentioned before by the time June arrived, you would know what the SIG conference was going to do. We watched the three large conferences because those were the ones that would have major impact. We pretty much knew if we had to make quick adjustments or not.

NORBERG: Were there other financial crises?

DEBLASI: In the early '90s, we had a downturn in the economy and we had to be very careful and plan with the idea that we might get a drop off in membership and a drop off at the conferences. This was still in a critical period, so we did some very careful planning with and watched those numbers very carefully. After that, I don't really remember that we ran into what I would call major revenue issues but we did run into conference fluctuations.

NORBERG: With respect to members, was there much volatility with the number of members per year?

DEBLASI: No. We had a strong growth period from about '90 to about mid '95. We had some leveling off, in the late '90s. Membership was also very important to us because advertisements revenue in CACM was dependent on its circulation.

NORBERG: And that wouldn't be chalked up to the Publications Board? Would that be probably general revenue of the association?

DEBLASI: Sure. Everything went into the general revenues of the association with the exception of the SIG revenue which was ACM revenue but we kept accounts for each of the SIGs.

NORBERG: Were you involved in any of the education initiatives that ACM put forward? For example, the Curriculum Committee that was tasked to help first with just higher education, then later on the area of K-12. There were some other things about educating the public about certain kinds of computing advantages. We covered that. And in general, did the Education Committee of ACM make any impact inside the house?

DEBLASI: I'm going to split the education question up, if we can. First, I'm going to deal with the education committee that dealt with the curriculum, particularly the college curricular. That was a closed group and something that continues on in ACM. The people that were involved in that were coming out with curriculum '95, curriculum '96, etc. This was kind of a formal process and I didn't get involved in that a great deal.

But the other thing was they were trying to get initiatives in education beyond that, and I did get involved. As a matter of fact, the thing about educating the public came up several times. We were looking for ways in which ACM's name could get out there to the public. I don't believe that I can point to something we accomplished at that time but today they are expanding the member on-line education program.

However, there were two other things going on in the education area that were very important. One had to do with what area of the universities would have jurisdiction over the computing science area, whether it's was going to be the engineering departments who, as you know, set criteria for certification of the engineering curriculum, or was it going to be the computer science department. Many computer departments are part of the engineering department. So this so-called certification question was important. ACM was very involved. There was some initiative in Texas, as an example. If I remember correctly, they were trying to put together a certification program for IT professionals, for programmers, systems people, and developers because of what they called the critical systems. I think the organization, as a whole, was not behind that program. We didn't want that kind of process. Then in addition to the certification process that had to do with certification between the engineering and computer science

NORBERG: What about accreditation?

DEBLASI: Well, accreditation is basically what I am talking about.

NORBERG: Oh, I thought you were talking curricular.

DEBLASI: Yes. But I'm talking about the accreditation on curricular and departments and certification with regard to the Texas issue.

NORBERG: I raised the issue of accreditation of programs in given universities along with--

DEBLASI: Yes. That's the thing about whether the engineering department is going to accredit the CS program or the CS people are going accredited it. Was CS engineering? That battle went on for quite some time. The best people to talk to about that probably are Peter and Stu. Stu probably remembers every aspect of it.

NORBERG: Oh, in great detail. He talked about it.

DEBLASI: To our academic community it was an important issue.

NORBERG: Now, one other thing you did, as I recall, and here's some evidence of said fact, you were on a technical standards committee. What is this about? This is all I could find, by the way.

DEBLASI: This is a publication. When I came here, I said, "One of the publications we didn't have was a publication about standards." I got an individual I had known in the standards community come in and start that publication for us, be in charge of getting articles and being the editor. I believe that was one of the things that we did in standards inside of the ACM. The ACM already had a technical standards committee because ACM used to be represented in

ANSI, the American National Standards Institute advisory group but not in X3 or JTC1 which I chaired or headed the US delegation at one point in time. There was an ANSI advisory committee in IT which had representatives from IBM, and other corporations, representatives from the National Institute of Standards today called NIST, and representatives from certain societies like the ACM. There was a committee inside of ACM that met every once in a while, so the person representing ACM would have a bases for any position. I don't know if these committees are still active.

NORBERG: Were you doing something that IBM was already doing, say, or some other computer manufacturers?

DEBLASI: No, it was just that the society had its representative.

NORBERG: In 1994, you were a member of this committee?

DEBLASI: No. I just sat in on their meetings for two reasons. One, was because I could sit in on any committee, and second, because of my reputation in standards, they would invite me to their session. There must be some minutes of these meeting.

NORBERG: Could be, but it's not on the digital library now, and that's not surprising. What did IEEE do in this area?

DEBLASI: IEEE is much more involved then ACM. IEEE really is involved in standards development. Don't forget, IEEE does standards and IEEE's committees are very formal. They have representatives that go to the X3, and all the important committees. ACM is not an organization that can be that involved in standards; it has a more academic interest.

NORBERG: I noticed in the slides that you actually gave a report in 1998 that there was one item in one of the slides that ACM should seek more interaction with the manufacturers. [Yes.] Now did you start this when you came, or had it started before without success?

DEBLASI: No, I felt very strongly that we needed to align ourselves as ACM by having formal interfaces with Microsoft, IBM, Intel, HP and other members of the industry. Over time we did begin to build stronger ties with industry. We not only went to them for money from time to time, but also to interest them in getting memberships and sponsoring our programs. That was only the beginning. I mention Gwen Bell as being someone that helped reach out to these organizations. My final report was really saying continuing this program is important and they have. It's very important that industry feel that ACM is a home for them as well.

NORBERG: How many were in there when you left?

DEBLASI: I'm not sure if we had what we would call an industry membership, but we had a lot of people from those big companies as members of ACM and a lot of industry members involved in our conferences and programs.

NORBERG: I see. My model for this is the American Physical Society, which has many corporate partners. They get quite a bit of money every year.

DEBLASI: Yes, they do. And we built relationships with ATT, Intel, HP, and Microsoft and certainly with IBM. Oh, by the way. As a key example of this, I keep referring back to this International Collegiate Programming Contest (ICPC). That was internally financed when I got here with only ACM funding the program. With Bill Poucher we went out and got AT&T to sponsor it. Eventually we got Microsoft to sponsor, and now we have IBM sponsoring the ICPC. Its sole sponsor today is IBM, they have done it for the last 10 years. It cost IBM millions of dollars a year to help us hold this worldwide program.

NORBERG: You're kidding! That much? [Yes.] Wow, I'm impressed.

DEBLASI: That was the big breakthrough for that program. Bill Poucher and I went out and got that money. We got them very interested, and that's why it's the tremendous international program that it is today.

NORBERG: Speaking of other things that were funded outside, there was a time when the Turing Award was in the neighborhood of \$25,000. Now, I came across something, again in the records of the association, that there was an attempt to compile a higher amount of money so that we could give out a quarter of a million dollars, or whatever sum was available.

DEBLASI: We did. I think today it is a quarter million dollars. ACM has gotten more money recently. That was one of the early funding initiatives. We just simply said, "Look, this is the most prestigious award in computing. We have to get more money." I think the first amount ACM raised, was \$50,000. I think AT&T gave us some of that money. Then we raised it to \$75 or \$100,000.

NORBERG: Were there objections to this amount of prize money from members?

DEBLASI: Well, I don't remember that we got a negative reaction. You add to the prestige of the prize by having more money." Since we didn't take the money from internal sources—in other words, we were not sacrificing one program for another I don't remember a negative reaction. Did someone mention that or is there a comment?

NORBERG: Yes. It was mentioned in Council minutes at some point, and well before your time. Another thing that is before your time in this same vein, Bryan mentioned to me the companion question to the manufacturers: was ACM involved in any government initiatives while you were here, the way the "superhighway" was being developed.

DEBLASI: We were supporters of certain government programs and not supporters of others. This was very limited. We were not supporters of the encryption chip. We were supporters of the high-end computer initiative. We were supporters of additional money being given to NSF in the computing field. I called on NSF from time to time. The things we supported both verbally and in some of our publications, were consistent with positions voiced at our Council meetings. We aligned sometimes with CRA, the Computer Research Association. We were more inclined to get involved with these kinds of matters once we had our support staff in Washington.

NORBERG: Once high performance computing became a presidential initiative, then all the various groups that had been in support of it were recognized in [inaudible] the Budget Office, but it was only really important groups; coordinating committees weren't on there.

DEBLASI: I don't know if ACM would have been on that list.

NORBERG: I don't know. I'd have to look again.

DEBLASI: Sometimes IEEE or CRA would have shown up on that list.

NORBERG: Thinking back now to your ten years as executive director, what do you think was your most important accomplishment?

DEBLASI: If I had to just pick one of lasting importance, it would be the digital library.

NORBERG: Yes, you already have done that. But I want to get the one in there to see where your thinking was.

DEBLASI: I think if I had to look back, I'd certainly want to say the organization progress financially, internationally, and with industry were all important for its future development.

NORBERG: That report there summarizes all of that in a very good way.

DEBLASI: But the key, if you have to look at one thing I think the digital library will have the most lasting effect.

NORBERG: Why did you decide to leave?

DEBLASI: Oh, when I first came on board, I said I would do it for three to five years. At the end of the fifth year I did bring it up, they said they wanted me to continue. I said I would stay through the 50th Anniversary in 1997. Lots of things were tied to the recognition of the organization's 50th Anniversary. So we went through that whole program where we put on the big show out in San Jose. It was a major event for the field of computing as well as for ACM. At that time, I felt that a lot of the things that I was brought in to do initially had been accomplished. I decided to think about leaving, and I told ACM it was time. They assembled a search committee, and I expected to leave by mid-year 1998. But by the end of June, their first selection got into a problem. They asked me, "Would you stay to the end of the year?" I said I would. And that was it.

As I talked to people, I said, "Every organization's CEO should never stay more than 10 years because then you start feeling it's your organization." It's a feeling that you can understand from a human aspect but you have to keep that from happening. You start acting like the organization's yours and you start saying, "We can't do that." Because now you've got a body of experience and know you can't do it. So you need some fresh thinking. I also felt very secure that the people that I helped develop here were excellent and could carry the organization into the future. Pat had grown into a true COO. We had good directors in all the areas. I was very pleased when John White was selected because I knew John. I knew he understood what had to be done to continue the progress we had accomplished. On a personal note I would have

been very happy with the person that was first selected and will always be sorry he was denied the opportunity.

NORBERG: Did you play any role in the choice of the new CEO?

DEBLASI: I was involved. In the first selection I played a much greater role than I did in the second one. Because of my feeling about the first selection I backed off a little bit on the second one.

NORBERG: David is very angry.

DEBLASI: He's more than angry. He's never forgiven ACM and it was handled badly by the ACM but there is no use in going into it.

NORBERG: That's fine. I'm not going to push you in that direction. In fact, I'm going to shoot now away from ACM.

DEBLASI: But, again, I was very pleased at that point with the final choice.

NORBERG: I was quite intrigued by all of your board of elections work. Tell me something about it. There's so much interest in elections and machinery for elections and who's a crook and who isn't and so on. What do you say about this?

DEBLASI: I got into it in an interesting way. When I retired from IBM in 1988, I thought I was going to retire back then. Then I came to the ACM. When I left ACM, I thought I was going to retire again. I got a call after I retired from Tom D'Auria who told me, "Joe, I have a contract here with the Board of Elections. Could you come in and just take a look at things and give me your opinion." So I reviewed their Y2K effort and worked with them to get their program on track. In the middle of that, they were also trying to redesign their registration system, and the head of the Board told me, "Joe, we're having problems with this new registration system that IBM's trying to introduce. Would you take a look at it?" I looked at it and said, "Fire IBM." Then I said, "Let's me work with this other group n-Tier and together we'll put together a new registration system in three months." We did and installed it in March 2000. Then I went back into retirement.

A year later, just before the 9/11 situation, they called me up and said, "Joe, you know, as you've often said, our entire computing system and applications are antiquated." They said, "If we get the funding would head the program to redesign our election computing systems. They got the funding. The project was to start in January 2002 which it did but we first went through the 9/11 disaster since the Board of Elections is only a few blocks from the World trade Center. I worked with them on a volunteer basis to get their systems back up and operational. In fact, there was supposed to be an election on the day of 9/11, believe or not. A city in panic had an election going on and they had to cancel it. Our redesign included registration, candidate processing, poll worker, poll sites/facilities, and all other aspects of the election process. So what I designed is a totally integrated system and we're still, to this day, adding applications to it. It really is excellent systems and may be the most advanced election support system in the US. I have learned a great deal about election systems, maybe more than I wanted to know. But

it's been a very interesting program. I will continue to be involved for some time to come if the funding is approved

NORBERG: Well, I do not let an occasion like this go by without asking what topics I missed. Are there things that you think were important that I didn't raise in this interview?

DEBLASI: One of the important things is the transition that allowed ACM to become a broader financially sound and well-managed organization. That was an important transition, because there were a lot of people who wanted to have a decentralized organization where they ran this area or that area. Making that transition, bringing them into the scope of the organization properly, without losing their enthusiasm for the organization and without sacrificing what I called a well organized, well functioning, well managed organization was key. It was a subtle transformation that we accomplished to function in a more corporate manner. We had to do carefully, but it did take hold. I think today, as it was when I left, this organization is run as a corporate organization, but has not lost its ability to allow for individual contributions, and member participation.

NORBERG: You're talking about the volunteers in the main now?

DEBLASI: Volunteers, yes.

NORBERG: But where does this leave members who are general every year, and who pay the members' dues? Why is that any different than National Geographic?

DEBLASI: Well, it's different in the following sense. In an organization like ACM, a member adds to the prestige of the organization by being part of it, by saying this organization is important and likewise receives prestige from being identified with others who are leaders in the field. Why would you belong to any organization such as the American Physical Society if it did not add to your value as a professional?

NORBERG: Panache.

DEBLASI: Right. You do it because there's a prestige and other benefits you get from the activities of the association. Now, there are different types of members. There are members that are participants who look at the organization as a place where I can do certain things. There are members who want to be identified with the association. There are members who feel that the organization provides a unique conduit for information that's very hard to find anywhere else. If you ask to me, "Why did Member A, who gets his or her copy of Communications each month, but never come to headquarter, never been involved in a SIG or conference or activity why is that individual still a member? I believe the statue of the organization provide an identity with people that give who have a common and professional value.

NORBERG: I could see that as being a very ephemeral transition to make.

DEBLASI: The more we (volunteers, members, and staff) make ACM an outstanding organization, the greater value it has as the most prestigious international organization in computing.

NORBERG: I'll go ahead and ask for you to volunteer anything else you wanted to do. I heard you talk about transition several times today, but I didn't get that focus into it. I was thinking just that we're doing this and we're doing that.

DEBLASI: Yes, but each thing we talked about was of substantive value to the whole transformation. As an example to make ACM an international organization added to its prestige. ACM is known around the world, and our Turing Award is known around the world, there's international prestige in that. Our publications are known around the world. Our publications are going into China, they're going into Europe and I am sure they're going to people who aren't even members, because they're going into libraries. So they see ACM. So that provides for additional interest in ACM. They see an organization identified with their professional field with international prestige and they want to have ACM's professional identity and think I ought to join ACM. You look at my career. I've had a number of awards and recognitions where I'd been professionally acknowledged still I hold my fellowship in ACM as very important (not only for what it recognizes about me) but because of the list prestigious names that are listed as ACM fellows.

NORBERG: A fellow in ACM is an important thing. Well, Joe, thank you very much.

DEBLASI: Well, thank you.