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Honoring Our Best

It is June again and we gather once more in San Francisco to honor the best among us. It is proper, important, and fitting that we should do this. Not only to celebrate

the successes and contributions of our colleagues but to convey to the general public the remarkable power of computer science and the value its practitioners and theorists give to the world. In many cases, the value is easily expressed and understood by many who benefit, but in many others, the work is more obscure and its utility less obvious and may be realized only long after its initial achievement. We do our colleagues and the general public a service when we explain and honor the work of these men and women and remind them of the increasing importance of computing and the myriad applications this discipline has spawned.

We owe the ACM Awards Committee and the many members who lead and serve on it our gratitude. It is a difficult task to evaluate the candidates and their work and to place it in the constellation of other work that has preceded it. Of course, none of this can be accomplished without nominations to work from and that is where you come in. Anyone who has ever prepared a nomination or endorsed one will know it is not an easy task, but it is a vital one. The universe of computer science has expanded dramatically since its earliest period and it is impossible to be expert in all things. The members of the awards committee are helped enormously in their task by well written, thoughtful, and, above all, clear nominations that explain the value, impact, and importance of the work to be recognized. Placing it in the perspective of earlier work, ar-

ticulating the advances it has made, explaining its utility where this is not apparent are all extremely helpful.

In some cases, more than one person has contributed to the work to be honored and it is appropriate to recognize a small group. One of the most difficult tasks of the nominators and the award committee members is to assess whether the work to be recognized is properly represented by the awardees.

A new non-ACM award, The Queen Elizabeth II Prize for Engineering, illustrates this point. The prize of one million pounds Sterling is offered to a group of up to three honorees. It is

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a major new award to be made biannually and it complements the Nobel prizes in Science and the ACM A.M. Turing Award that is specifically for contributions to computer science. It is important because it recognizes that engineering has as profound an influence as science since its roots are found in the application of science to improve the quality of our lives.

The first prize granted will be presented by Her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth II, in June 2013 not long after the ACM Awards banquet on June 15. The award committee received a nomination for a group achievement: The Internet and the World Wide Web. You may imagine what a challenge it was for the committee to attempt to select no more than three people to be recognized for this engineering feat. In fact, they could not and persuaded the foundation leadership that funds the award to permit them to recognize five individuals. The award rules were changed by the foundation leadership, more or less at the last minute, to accommodate this request. We have had similar experiences in the ACM Awards process, particularly in the Software System Award and Turing Award where three individuals (or more, in the case of the Software System Award) have occasionally been recognized for their extraordinary and collaborative work.

Returning to the principal theme of this column, I invite you to review the ACM Awards pages (<http://awards.acm.org/html/awards.cfm>) and to give serious thought to nominating colleagues whose work meets the award criteria and should be recognized. It is vital work because it helps ACM highlight and honor the work of computer scientists and engineers and it helps us to explain the value of that work to the general public.

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