

Joe DeBlasi – My Friend

Memorial By Bill Poucher - 28 April 2022

In 2002, Joseph S. DeBlasi was the first recipient and namesake of The ICPC Joseph S. DeBlasi Outstanding Contribution Award. He is a founding board member of the ICPC Foundation, serving on Finance and Awards. For over 30 years Joe has been a mentor of the ICPC International Collegiate Programming Contest (ICPC) and its global mission through his years of service to ACM as ACM Executive Director. He is an ACM Fellow and recipient of the ACM Outstanding Contribution Award.

After graduating from Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Joe DeBlasi served in the US Air Force, first as an F-86 pilot. Then, having majored in math, he was selected as one of six to work with IBM on US Air Force needs. Joe joined IBM in 1964, where he had worldwide responsibility for IBM product standards and IBM's relations with national and international standards and technology organizations.

After retiring from IBM, Mr. DeBlasi became Executive Director and CEO of the Association for Computing Machinery (ACM). He retired from ACM in 1999. He continued his service as Chairman of Decision Systems Inc., a computing and management consulting firm, and as a co-managing partner of the IMI-DSI LLC, a New York information technology consulting firm. He served on the Board of Directors of non-profit and cultural organizations such as COMAP. Joe served on the ICPC Executive Committee for the last 20 years.

To honor Joe, the ICPC Foundation will continue to award the ICPC Joseph S. DeBlasi Outstanding Contribution Award each year at the ICPC World Finals, with the next award scheduled for November 8, 2022, in Dhaka, Bangladesh, hosted by the University of Asia Pacific.

When Joe and I first met as ACM members in the 1980's, we worked together on several initiatives including acm.org, local activities, but mostly on building the ICPC community. When we first discussed the future direction of the ICPC, with global aspirations and an organization that brought people together, without borders, while respecting university, industry, and community partners, Joe, in his amazing calm and collected manner, told me that an organization had to be financially solvent and look to the business matters of programs. And then he told me, "But we need to do this, because we can." ☺

With all the turns and bumps along the way, the humanitarian purpose has prevailed with his mentorship a certainty. And so, today, with participation in 111 countries, with 3,450 universities, 75,000 volunteers, coaches, and team members, and in our 53rd year with 400,000 ICPC Alumni, the humanitarian purpose remains at the heart of the ICPC: to advance prospects for the next generation, by bringing students together, without borders, working together to solve problems, preparing them to build digital systems that benefit their neighbors with the wholehearted support of universities, industry, and community leaders, globally.

And Joe loved my requirement, that we do so in goodwill, in accordance with the Golden Rule, and with unconditional affection, in harmony with my grandmother's values. My guess is that our grandma's values were in sync.

And so, in the ICPC, we see people as souls, academia, industry, and community as precious, and work now to build on the strengths to make a little more progress toward directions set hundreds and thousands of years past.

So let me end with this thought:

*The path to greatness ends in ruin.
The path to goodness endures forever.*

*That path would surely go unpaved,
But for the stones laid down before us.*

We need only be about that task in memory of Joe DeBlasi who paved his part and never passed up an opportunity to encourage others to do so much more.

Best,



Bill

PS: My favorite DeBlasi interview: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ibbcVbF-RiI>