In Memoriam

Professor Dr.-Ing. Dr.-Ing. E. h. Wolfgang Straßer

( 10.08.1941 - 24.01.2015 )

Wolfgang Straßer was born in Metzingen, Germany, on 10.08.1941 and passed away, unexpected, in Tübingen, Germany, on 24.01.2015. He started his work in Computer Graphics in Berlin in 1970 and was one of the pioneers in Computer Graphics in Europe and beyond. Wolfgang Straßer was married to his wife Hiltrud, with whom he raised four children, one son and three daughters.

After receiving his Diploma in Electrical Engineering (Telecommunications) from the Technische Universität Berlin in 1969, he worked for some time as a young engineer developing hardware for the company Heinz Nixdorf in Berlin, before he joined in 1970 a research group under the leadership of Wolfgang Gilioli doing very early and pioneer research in raster technologies at the Heinrich-Hertz Institute also in Berlin. In 1974 he received his Ph. D. from the TU Berlin with a thesis on “Fast Generation of Curves and Surfaces
on Graphic Displays”; Wolfgang Gilo was the thesis advisor. Independently of Ed Catmull’s work, Wolfgang Straßer’s dissertation already contained a description of the z-buffer algorithm back in 1974, i.e. right at the advent of raster graphics. Other important results are his algorithms for efficiently rendering freeform curves and surfaces, taking into account graphics hardware, and in particular his work on antialiasing. Today, these algorithms are common knowledge. In order to fully appreciate Straßer’s contributions, one has to recall that his work dates back to the days when interactive graphics applications, and in particular raster graphics, were widely unknown.

In 1978 he joined José Encarnação, who had been his colleague at the Heinrich-Hertz Institute in Berlin, and he was appointed to the Computer Science department of the Technische Universität Darmstadt, Interactive Graphic Systems Group, as an Associate Professor. Until 1986 he strongly supported José Encarnação in establishing Darmstadt as an international leading center for computer graphics research and applications.

Wolfgang Straßer gave major contributions to teaching and research at the Technische Universität Darmstadt from 1978 to 1986, not only in Computer Graphics, but also in Computer Science in general. He was as well strongly involved in services to the TU Darmstadt, for example serving in 1981/1982 as Head of the Computer Science Department. For his big merits and strong contributions he was awarded by the TU Darmstadt the honorary doctoral degree in 2000.

In 1986 Wolfgang Straßer accepted an offer for a chair position from the University of Tübingen. His chair became the nucleus for the „Wilhelm Schickard Institute for Informatics”, and eventually the Tübingen computer science department. Wolfgang Straßer started the graphics group in Tübingen from scratch and immediately established it as one of the premier research groups in the field. A characteristic trait of his research was the close interplay of algorithmic contributions with graphics hardware.

Several honors and awards (Eurographics Fellow (1991), honorary doctoral degree TU Darmstadt (2000), Eurographics Honorary Fellow (2009), Chair Eurographics Fellows (2012)) attest to his special standing in the community. Wolfgang Straßer was a founding member of the subcommittee on computer graphics within the German Informatics Society (GI), and he shaped policy within this body for several decades. He started the highly successful Eurographics/Siggraph Workshop Series on Graphics Hardware in 1986 and turned it into the premier event in this field in the world.
Following retirement in 2009, he stayed active in the community, e.g., as chair of the Eurographics fellows.

With Wolfgang Straßer we all lose not only one of the first pioneers in Computer Graphics and one of the important architects for the building up of Darmstadt as the leading “Computer Graphics Hub” worldwide, but also a very successful academic teacher, a very motivating and engaged colleague and an outstanding scientist. He was also a great professional companion for many of us, for many, many years and an extremely precious, really good friend. We all will miss him very much. But we will not only miss the colleague and the expert … we will miss even more the friend and the great personality he was. We will never forget him and will forever honor his memory!

Our sincere sympathy and condolences go to his wife Hiltrud, to his children and to all his family.