

Dedication of Seismometer Testing Observatory to Jim Fowler PASSCAL Instrument Center • March 28, 2012

Remarks by David Simpson, IRIS President

At a gathering of this nature, it is traditional for a member of the senior staff to step forward and say “I fondly remember the day that so-and-so joined our organization as a new employee.”

In the case of an organization as young as IRIS – or an individual as old as Jim – this becomes difficult. We can’t find anyone who was around to welcome Jim on that day he joined IRIS as our first employee on November 20, 1985.

Jim’s initial title at IRIS was Chief Engineer – and his strong skills as an electronic designer and software engineer have been an enormous asset to IRIS and PASSCAL for the past 27 years.

In the early days of IRIS, Jim was well known for his talents at the bench – as an electronics technician, his skills in sorting out FIR filter responses, his sys-admin talents in setting up the office network at IRIS headquarters, and his advice and counsel on all matters of office administration and financial and legal issues.

It was Jim who led the interesting – if somewhat short-lived – attempts to develop a PASSCAL BUS as a new architecture for portable instrumentation.

Jim nurtured the initial contacts with Paul Passmore in the development of what in 1987 became the first REFTEK PASSCAL instrument.

Jim was my Program Manager (and hence boss) when Doug Johnson and I were selected to establish the first broadband Instrument Center at Lamont in 1989 and took delivery of the first broadband instruments just prior to the Loma Prieta earthquake.

At the same time, Jim worked with Walter Mooney to create the original active source facility using the SGR recorders in collaboration with the USGS in Menlo Park.

When I came to IRIS in 1991, it was obvious that Jim was the dominant force in the IRIS headquarters office in Roslyn. At that stage, the IRIS President was a rotating sabbatical position for university faculty – and it wasn't clear that Jim, Rhett, Liz and Dee quite knew what to do with me – or what they considered my job should be. I was shown a nice corner office with a balcony and politely told that they would be available if I needed any help – but meanwhile, they had important work to do.

Once it became clear that they were unlikely to get rid of me for a while, a strong sense of mutual respect developed and I have benefitted from – and am deeply thankful for – the advice and guidance that I have received from Jim over the years.

That first year that I was at IRIS was a busy one. The Data Management Center was moved to Seattle, with Tim Ahern as Program Manager. The 3-channel active source Instrument Center was created at Stanford. In hindsight, I appreciate the significant influence that Jim had in helping to guide the selection process for those two significant decisions for our young organization.

By the late 1990s, it had become obvious that IRIS and PASSCAL would benefit from one coordinated Instrument Center and an extensive national search, led by Anne Meltzer, was carried out to select a single institution to consolidate the work that had previously been done by Lamont and Stanford.

As you are all aware, New Mexico Tech, led by Rick Aster and with significant support from President Lopez and Vice President Van Romero, developed a compelling proposal – which included the state's contribution of this wonderful building – and Socorro was chosen in 1998 to be the new home of the Instrument Center, with Marcos Alvarez as the first PIC Director.

Jim's involvement in the selection of Socorro for the PIC was just as important and even handed as the role he played in the earlier selection of the Lamont and Stanford Instrument Centers and the DMC's move to Seattle – but somehow, I think that he and Cynthia were secretly rooting for this choice and the opportunity it eventually provided for them to return home to New Mexico.

Jim came to IRIS as Chief Engineer. He has served for more than 25 years as Program Manager. Engineer and Manager are the titles that he has held – but the real role he has played is better described as coach, team leader and friend.

With friendship and respect, Jim has helped coach a complex team with many diverse players – the research community, the PASSCAL Standing Committee, the IRIS Board, our partners in the USGS and at the instrument companies. He has helped us to come together and meet a variety of challenges, and led us to some amazing successes – for which he and all of us can be very proud.

The wonderful team that Jim, Marcos and Bruce have developed here at the PIC is one of the deep strengths of IRIS. The service that all of you on the PIC staff provides to the IRIS community and international seismology is truly a treasure – and I want to salute you and thank you for the wonderful work that you perform with such talent and dedication.

Even the best of coaches has to rely on the solid support of those close to him – and I would like to pay special tribute to Cynthia as Jim’s unique teammate on the field of life. Cynthia has been a special source of support to Jim, a friend to us all, and a gracious host at many delicious dinners for visiting committees at the beautiful home that they created here in Socorro. Please accept our sincere thanks for all that you have done for Jim and for us.

In 1984, Jim was part of a dedicated team of researchers that changed the culture of seismology in fundamental ways that have led to a rich harvest of new discoveries for our science. Over the past two days, the PASSCAL Standing Committee has met and set in motion some exciting new developments that we hope will continue to build on those traditions and strengths. The challenge – to IRIS, to the PASSCAL Standing Committee, to all of you at the PIC – is to rise to the same levels of excellence and leadership that Jim established.

I invite Rick Aster, Bruce Beaudoin, James Gridley and Shane Ingate to join me as we dedicate the Jim Fowler Test Observatory in your name, with sincere thanks for all you have done for IRIS and for your service to the seismological community.

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