

Ten years of the ESLY award

Sylvia James, Spring 2003

This is the most prestigious event of SLA Europe year and the Board are very proud that we have had the chance to acknowledge such a wide group of outstanding information professionals in this way over the last ten years. Digging deep into my old papers I have been able to put together this article about the nine recipients.

ESLY was first awarded in 1994/5 to Michel Bauwens, then of BP Nutrition in Antwerp, Belgium, for his pioneering work in developing the concept of the virtual library and the special librarian, which he called a 'cybrarian'. The concept was widely disseminated at the time and I can remember being very pleased to see an article describing a cybrarian in an airline magazine on the way to the SLA 1994 Atlanta Conference in the USA, a trip to which was of course the main purpose of the award for Michel.

Since then SLA Europe has presented the ESLY award to five British professionals and three Scandinavians, reflecting the geographic diversity of our membership. They also have worked in a wide range of positions and every year represented a different sector and type of information work. We have had over seventy nominations in the nine years and presented several magnums of champagne to members who have nominated the winners.

For the next two years, British ESLY winners were chosen. The second ESLY was Ian Thomson of the European Documentation Centre at the University of Wales, whose award was presented at the SLA conference in Montreal in June 1995. Ian was followed in 1996/7 by Ruth Colyer, then at Welcome in the UK who had developed an innovative online pharmaceutical database called WISDOM. SLA Europe was able to present the ESLY award to Ruth at the SLA Annual Conference in 1996 in Boston for the first time at the International Visitors Reception with the co-operation of the Social Sciences Division, which gave the award a really prestigious slot in the Conference programme.

In 1997/8 the first Scandinavian ESLY was announced, awarded to Tuula Salo of Merita Bank in Finland for her work in leadership and mentoring in the Finnish information world. Tuula attended the conference in Seattle, where she became that year's ESLY at a reception at the top of the landmark, revolving Seattle Tower.

Tuula was followed as ESLY for 1998/9 by Lise Lotte Lindskog of Celsius Tech in Sweden, who was nominated for similar leadership activities in the Swedish information field. The award was presented at the Indianapolis Conference in 1998 at the International Visitors Reception by a representative of the EU Delegation to the USA, who had been involved in a special EU presentation that day.

It was back to the UK for the next three years of ESLY and in 1999/2000 with an unusual choice of Kevin Miles, certainly a non-conventional 'information professional', who was a serving police officer and who had done some exceptional knowledge management work in the Surrey Police Force. Kevin made a real impact at the conference in Minneapolis in June 1999 receiving his award in his British Inspector of Police uniform!

2000/2001 saw a complete change again, with the choice of Will Hann, for his work in the entrepreneurial development and ongoing publication of the very well known 'Freepint' electronic newsletter and website for information professionals. Following his award in Philadelphia at the SLA Millennium Conference, he 'appeared' for SLA Europe again in another Association-wide event in Brighton at the second SLA Global Conference in October of that year. The latest two ESLY awards have been to information professionals who have moved away from the mainstream and developed innovative roles within their organisations, demonstrating the range of skills and expertise that can be built from the more conventional aspects of our work.

In 2001/2002, Annabel Colley, whose job title of BBC Current Affairs Web Producer, summarises the essence of her award, was chosen as the eight ESLY and received her award in a blisteringly hot Conference in San Antonio, Texas.

The current ESLY for 2002/3 is Margareta Nelke of Tetra-Pak in Sweden, who also works in a very progressive position within her organisation, and received her award last summer at the Conference in Los Angeles

Of course, it would not have been possible to have acknowledged all these individual achievements in such a very special way, without the generous help of the sponsors who have supported the award. In the first few years and in 1998/9 we would like to thank Gale and the Information Access Company for backing the award. In 1997/8, ESLY was sponsored by Silverplatter.

From 1999 to date the award has been sponsored by Factiva. They have also very generously sponsored the International Visitors Reception at the Annual Conference with Clare Hart their President & Chief Executive Officer presenting the awards. Thanks also to the Social Sciences Division and Susan Berg in the early years of the ESLY. And more recently to Anne Sweeney, who have helped us enormously with arranging the logistics of the award as part of the International Visitors Reception.

We would also like to thank Blackwells, Alacra and SWETs for sponsoring the Summer Soiree in the last few years, which has also given us an opportunity to invite the ESLY to speak and to meet European SLA members in London each summer, who may not have had a chance to attend the SLA Annual Conference. So, the Awards Committee of SLA Europe are about to choose the tenth ESLY and there is no doubt that it will be someone as different and groundbreaking as all our award recipients have been over the last nine years.