

Vote of Thanks

by Professor Alexander L. Wolf, University of Colorado at Boulder and University of Lugano

I feel a bit like a stranger in a strange land, and in fact I am. This is my first opportunity to attend an Inaugural Lecture. The presentation of an Inaugural Lecture is not a tradition of academia in the United States. But it is a wonderful tradition, a grand tradition, and an important tradition. To me, as the stranger, it speaks to the deep respect to which my European colleagues continue to hold the position of Professor. In the United States one finds, generally, a very different attitude, summed up perhaps by the old saying “Those who can’t do, teach”.

So, it is an honor to have been asked to lead a vote of thanks to Professor Rosenblum for his Inaugural Lecture. As I understand it, I am expected to provide some perspective on the lecture and the lecturer. This is perhaps one of the easiest and most pleasurable things I have been asked to do in my career.

I have known David first as Mr. Rosenblum, then Dr. Rosenblum, and now Professor Rosenblum. In fact, as some of you know, Professor Rosenblum and I are fond of annually recalling the first time we met: As graduate students we gave our first public presentations in the same session at a conference on the Ada programming language, its applications and environments, in St. Paul, Minnesota. We celebrated our 20th anniversary this past October 16th. Professor Rosenblum’s wife Sarah, who is in the audience, may not like to hear this, but I can tell you that Professor Rosenblum and I have rarely failed to remember that anniversary.

We subsequently shared five years together as researchers at AT&T Bell Laboratories in Murray Hill, New Jersey. I left for academia, and Professor Rosenblum did the same a few years later. Together we developed and sustained a working relationship that I honestly count as one of my most valuable professional experiences.

I have had a unique opportunity to watch, up close, how Professor Rosenblum approaches problems, and I am sure that you got a strong sense of that approach from his lecture tonight: impeccable taste, cold objectivity, a dedication to scientific honesty and precision, and a brilliant creativity. The only analogy that I think is worthy of Professor Rosenblum is, perhaps, as strange as it may sound, that of an expert diamond cutter. Research problems, and by that I mean the truly deep, intellectually challenging, and important research problems, are as valuable as diamonds. And, like diamond cutters, there are few in our society to whom we should entrust those problems. I can tell you that University College London, London Software Systems, and frankly Europe more broadly are very fortunate to have Professor Rosenblum here to cut diamonds.

As Professor Rosenblum discussed in his lecture, Bell Labs was a wonderful place to mine for research problems. What Professor Rosenblum has done with this opportunity is

hit upon one of the fundamental problems facing our discipline. While the problem of scalability certainly existed during and before our tenure at Bell Labs, it is only more prominent and significant today. In those 15 years since we joined the Labs, computing has truly come of age, in the sense that it is no longer the domain and concern only of technologists, but now of society as a whole. Society, for better or worse, has embraced computing to such an extreme degree that there is simply no going back.

Pervasive computing, large-scale data integration, global financial management, the world-wide web, are made possible by software that is somehow at a scale larger than any other “device” known to engineering. As engineers—software engineers—we are asked to help create systems that are reliable, dependable, predictable, adaptable, secure, and, yes, scalable. But I will let you in on a dirty little secret: Today they are not. Today they barely work. The significance of the research agenda that Professor Rosenblum has been following, and is planning to follow, is undeniable.

Professor Rosenblum, David, you have been a sometime collaborator, but a long-time friend. I look forward to continuing our work together and look forward to watching you shape the intellectual landscape of your new professional home. Your lecture tonight portends a rich and long series of important and fundamental advances on a profound and relevant problem. On behalf of all of us in attendance tonight, I thank you for your lecture, for the insights that it has brought to us, and wish you happiness and success in all that you do in the years to come.