In Memoriam: Scott Hamilton

Lee Garber

Longtime Computer editor Scott Hamilton died on Saturday, 4 September, after a brief illness. Hamilton, 55, worked for the IEEE Computer Society for 17 years.

At the time of his death, Hamilton was Computer’s senior acquisitions editor and also headed up the Computer Society’s Product Development Group.

He was born in Richland, Washington. His family moved to San Jose, California, when he was four years old. That was to remain their home base, even when they spent a year in Japan and a year in Joliet, Illinois.

Hamilton graduated from San Jose’s Pioneer High School and then went to the University of California, Berkeley, where he earned his bachelor’s degree and a doctorate in English. While an undergraduate, he spent a year of study abroad in Paris.

Hamilton did postdoctoral work at the California Institute of Technology on an Andrew W. Mellon Fellowship. While there, he wrote a book, Ezra Pound and the Symbolist Inheritance.

He subsequently worked as an adjunct professor at several Southern California universities before coming to the IEEE Computer Society in 1993, where he started as a staff editor with Computer.

Until then, the magazine principally used only peer-reviewed content that authors submitted on their own or that guest editors obtained.

On his own, Hamilton studied computer technology to understand the field and be able to recognize subjects and developments that would be important to Computer’s readers. He soon started selecting timely and interesting topics the magazine could cover and then acquiring articles that provide this content. This was the beginning of a unique role in content acquisition that he carved out for himself on Computer.

Hamilton subsequently worked closely with Computer’s editorial board in establishing the magazine’s editorial calendar for each year. In 1998, he began the publication’s annual January Outlook issue, which looks at upcoming matters of importance in computer technology.

He also occasionally wrote and co-wrote articles for Computer, several based on interviews he conducted with well-known computing professionals. Some of his articles were among the magazine’s most popular pieces.

Over time, Hamilton’s role on Computer expanded, and he eventually became a manager, responsible for the magazine’s day-to-day operations under its then-executive editor Angela Burgess, now the Computer Society’s executive director. When Burgess became the organization’s publisher in late 1999, Hamilton took over Computer’s reins.

Despite the additional responsibilities, he still oversaw article acquisition for the magazine, helped design its covers, and worked on various Computer Society projects.

In 2009, Burgess picked Hamilton, still in charge of Computer, to run the Computer Society’s Product Development Group. The group is responsible for showcasing and promoting the Society’s products, as well as increasing its brand awareness.

“Scott was brilliant,” said Burgess. “He was also wholly committed to the excellence of Computer and the Computer Society. He was a good friend, and he will be sorely missed.”

“As the monthly flagship publication of the IEEE Computer Society, Computer is definitely a team product,” said Carl Chang, the magazine’s editor in chief and a professor at Iowa State University, where he is chair of the Department of Computer Science. “However, for many years it was Scott who gave Computer a distinct personality. Scott’s untimely departure is a huge loss to our profession. He will be long remembered as a brilliant senior acquisitions editor; a loyal colleague; and a dear friend to many of us, both volunteers and staff.”

Hamilton is survived by his children, Philip, who attends Warren Wilson College in North Carolina, and Kate, who attends Mcalester College in Minnesota; his parents, Robert and Dorothy Hamilton of San Jose; a brother, Steve, who lives in New Jersey; and a sister, Deborah, who resides in California. The family will hold a private memorial service.

Those interested can send donations in Hamilton’s memory to the American Lung Association (www.lungusa.org) or the Lymphoma Research Foundation (www.lymphoma.org).