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Morriss '73 Part of Team Behind Groundbreaking USB Technology

May 29, 2013

BLOOMINGTON, Ill. – A team of Intel Corporation computer experts that included Illinois Wesleyan graduate Jeff Morriss has won the European Inventor Award 2013 for the development of Universal Serial Bus (USB) technology that is used to easily connect computers to other electronic devices.

The award is Europe's most important prize for innovation and is presented annually by the European Patent Office to outstanding innovators in five categories for their contributions to technological, social and economic progress. The USB team won in the category "Non-European Countries." The 2013 winners were announced May 28 in Amsterdam.



Morriss, a 1973 Illinois Wesleyan graduate, was part of the five-member Intel team that developed the USB. After majoring in physics at Illinois Wesleyan, Morriss earned a master's degree from Northwestern University before joining Intel. Ajay V. Bhatt led the Intel team, which included Morriss, Shaun Knoll, Shelagh Callahan and Bala Cadambi.

The idea for the USB formed when Bhatt became frustrated with the process of reconfiguring and rebooting the computer while installing a printer for his wife's computer. Bhatt decided to create a connection interface that would recognize and run new devices automatically when they were plugged into a computer. Taking inspiration from the common electrical wall outlet, the idea of the Universal Serial Bus was born — an interface working by 'translating' the different signals from peripherals and delivering them into one centralized message stream to the computer's operating system.

Considered the "gold standard in computer connectivity," the USB replaced competing plug designs, making the plug-and-play a reality and the protocol an industry standard. The invention is now found in billions of electronic devices worldwide. USB not only allows users easy connections of computers with webcams, smartphones and even complex scientific instruments, it also streamlines work for hardware and software developers.

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