

Margareta Nelke wins the European Special Librarian of the Year (ESLY) award for 2002

Dow Jones & Reuters



The winner of the Special Libraries Association (SLA) European Librarian of the Year award for 2002 is Margareta Nelke, Technology intelligence Manager at Tetra Pak in Sweden. The award, sponsored by Factiva, seeks to recognise outstanding achievement in special librarianship in Europe.

Margareta Nelke has developed the Tetra Pak library in line with the corporation's present and future needs. She has transformed the physical library into a digital information offering downloadable at the desktop. Library staff, now Technology Intelligence Officers, act as information consultants and analysts in development of projects, and provide a structured and continuous monitoring function on technical developments. Margareta has worked as a corporate library manager for Tetra Laval Group since 1983, firstly at Alfa-Laval Food Engineering, and latterly at Tetra Pak, becoming Technology Intelligence Manager in 1999.

Her enthusiasm for knowledge management is evident: "Knowledge management and knowledge sharing are cornerstones in the information specialist profession. Throughout the years, I have learned a lot from my experienced colleagues and have also shared my own knowledge through lectures and publications such as the Knowledge Management in Swedish Corporation: The Value of Information and Information Services report published in 1998."

Chapter Newsletter Interview with Margareta Nelke By Neil Infield

Please tell me a bit about your background before Tetra Pak. I am especially interested in why you became an information professional?

At university I studied for a BA in arts and social science I then had several temporary positions including some low level teaching jobs in the university.

I started librarian studying to be a librarian in 1980 because enjoyed working in a library environment was aware that I enjoyed structuring information. I didn't know anything about corporate libraries at that time.

My idea of a career was to become a university librarian. However, during my education I changed my mind due to two experiences. One was a visit to a chemical corporation in southern Sweden. Their information specialist was very engaged and devoted to his tasks. He showed us how to search in commercial databases. A new world opened up - even if it was through a Texas Silent terminal printer. The other experience was when Lise-Lotte Lindskog, the ESly award winner of 1998, held a lecture on working at a corporate information centre. Her inspiring lecture convinced me to go for career in corporate libraries. I have never regretted it. Thank you Lise-Lotte! I specialized in corporate libraries in my final term although ironically my first job after library school was in a children's public library. Six months there only reinforced my desire to work in the corporate sector.

In 1983 I started my first corporate job at Alfa Laval and in 1989 moved to Tetra Pak. On both occasions my task was to build up a corporate library from nothing. I was thrown in at the deep end with Alfa Laval and had no relevant experience so I had to learn as I went along. Networking with other colleagues from the Swedish Association for Information Specialists was absolutely key to making a success of building up the library.

What were some of the various activities that led to you receiving the ESLY award?

My department is now called Technology Intelligence after many name changes over the years. We match the global Tetra Pak department operating structure. Information professionals operate as team members within the research groups. They give external information which is relevant particularly to new products where there may not be expertise within the company. They have to make sure that the external aspects are covered by doing their homework such as searching for patents and getting relevant market research. The Technology Intelligence group also negotiates with information providers and tries to create best practice for the company.

Tetra Pak consists of twenty thousand employees worldwide with our clients mostly coming from research and development. The fact that Tetra Pak is privately owned means it is more supportive of long term developments and the family shareholders are very engaged in the company so it kind of has a family feel to it which is nice.

In March 2001 we closed down the physical library of books and journals which were given away to individual departments. The staff were kept on and focused their attention on to a consulting activity, joining the project teams. We recruited a food scientist to the team who had worked as a corporate communications director so she was used to an information approach and has now become an information professional.

How did you enjoy the SLA annual conference?

I have to admit that I was shocked by my first CE (Continuing Education) session Sunday because it was so traditional. However I have enjoyed many of the other sessions which I have attended. I like the open minded and friendly people who are more social than in Europe. They take good care of their guests here. I have learnt a lot, especially about quirky new technologies from Stephen Abram, plus e-learning from Factiva speakers. Also the case studies on managing electronic resources were insightful. One of the speakers described it as "like trying manage your cat".

What are your plans for the future?

Well I have just gone through a very recent career change. Since 1 June I am no longer responsible for managing the department including staff and other resources. Now I am responsible for driving, implementing and further developing the Technology Intelligence process. Having been a manager since 1983 this is a good career progression for me. My new role is much less operational but will involve promoting this activity to the rest of the company. It will require much more travel than before with twelve research and development sites in eight countries.

With all that going on will you have time for any hobbies?

I enjoy getting my hands dirty gardening but also reading and playing the piano. Besides that I also try to manage both my teenage daughter and my cat - a not very easy, but extremely mind-broadening enterprise.