

Peter Clarke wins the European Special Librarian of the Year (ESLY) award for 2003

Dow Jones & Reuters



The winner of the European Special Librarian of the Year Award for 2003 is Peter Clarke, Global Head of Information Services at Mercer Oliver Wyman, a leading strategy consultancy dedicated exclusively to the financial services industry.

The Award, which is generously sponsored by Factiva, was presented at the Special Libraries Association Annual Conference, held in New York from 7-12 June. It seeks to recognize outstanding achievements in librarianship and is now in its tenth year. Upon receiving the award, Peter Clarke commented, "I feel very honored to have won this award. It has made me realize how important it is to question existing models of library service delivery and create a service that is lean, efficient and effective".



Clare Hart CEO of Factiva looks on while Peter gives his acceptance speech at the International Reception during the SLA New York conference

Peter will be representing the European Chapter of the Special Libraries Association and Factiva at a number of upcoming functions throughout the year that he is in office, including the European Chapter's Summer Soiree, which takes place in London on 9th July.

Chapter Newsletter interview with Peter Clarke, ESLY 2003

By Helen Clegg

Peter Clarke is this year's European Special Librarian of the Year. The Award is given by the European Chapter of the Special Libraries Association and has been generously sponsored by Factiva for the last four years. Peter is Head of Global Information Services at strategy consultancy Mercer Oliver Wyman and is based in London. He started his library career in the early 1980's when he did his pre-library school experience in the Cairns Library at the John Radcliffe Hospital in Oxford in the days when medical information was really ahead with database retrieval products such as Medline. Subsequently he worked for management consultants Ernst & Whinney and then for PJB Publications, before moving to Mercer Oliver Wyman in 1990.

What does it feel like to be the Winner of the European Special Librarian of the Year Award?

I feel very good about it. Had someone mentioned at the beginning of the year that I'd be ESLY 2003 I would have laughed because although I'm quite passionate about what I do, I haven't traditionally been involved in professional circles. I was very flattered that Julia Hordle of Intelligent Resources asked me if I'd like to be nominated. I think one of the good things is that it started me thinking about my job. It actually made me stop and question why someone wanted to nominate me for the award. Julia wrote that I challenge existing models of librarianship – I certainly make sure I can justify what we have and what we need; for example if we don't need a catalog or an enquiry tracking system, why produce them? I think getting the award just crystallized my thinking about why I'd actually made the decisions I had. I was already aware that I very much focused on value-added services that supported the changing needs of my company's business. Also, winning the award has brought me in to the wider profession and I think that's great.

What are your reactions to the SLA conference in New York?

I was very impressed by the size of the SLA conference. I don't know in relative terms how successful it was compared to previous years, but my initial impression was that this was vast, bigger than anything I've ever been to. I think one of the things I was a little surprised by was the sparsity of business and finance related sessions. I went to a number of sessions and found it valuable that there were a number of people on the panels giving their views on a particular subject - a very good idea, as you get a number of different views on the same subject. I found the keynote speakers also very interesting, I had no preconceptions about how much they would align to the library and information industry. I also enjoyed meeting up with ex-colleagues again and relationship-building. In fact I met the person who'd recruited me thirteen years ago! I also met a lot of people who didn't know anybody there, and the whole thing was really friendly.

Do you have any views on the name change for our Association, which has been a recent hot topic?

I guess it's a bit of a shame that the name change didn't go through. I thought the name should change and that the IPI was the better choice as it would just attract so many more people. The 'international' part of the name is attractive to people, and in a company like mine which is global, it's easier to ask for a subscription to Information Professionals International than the Special Libraries Association. Today, many organizations don't understand the word Special and don't understand the word Libraries.

What is your message to special librarians today?

I think the most important thing today is to be able to demonstrate to senior management that the information service or library is a critical part of the business and definitely adds value. So that when there's a downturn in the business, senior management looks to streamline it, rather than cutting it back. So I think the key enabler is for the information professional to have a very strong grasp of what the business does, as this makes relationships with senior management far easier. If you can talk their language, you're far more likely to gain their support, respect and credibility for the information service or library.

Do you think information professionals and librarians will be replaced by technology?

I think that the longer I've been in the profession the more I'm convinced, that in organizations where the provision of information is complex, the role of people has become more and more important. Technology matures at its own rate and the biggest danger is to interpret that maturation as tipping the balance. Technology makes our lives a lot easier and can provide the icing on the cake, but I think the biggest danger is that it obscures the people factor. Organizations need to ensure that they get the people and processes in place – then think about the technology to support this, rather than spending money on technology with no thought to ongoing infrastructure to provide content. Despite all the lessons learned from redundant, unused corporate intranets this mistake still seems to frequently happen.