



James O. Henriksen

July 10, 1945 - April 6, 2019

James O. Henriksen, 73, passed away on Saturday, April 6, at home in Lewes, DE, after a hard fought battle with Idiopathic Pulmonary Fibrosis. Founder and CEO of Wolverine Software Corporation, Jim and his wife, Judy, moved from Alexandria, VA to Lewes in 2011. He anticipated retiring with the move, but never could give up his passion for contributing to the evolving field of computer simulation.

Jim was born in Muskegon, MI, the youngest of three children to parents Anna and Henry Henriksen. He attended public schools in Muskegon and spent summers working in his father's auto glass business, learning mechanical and interpersonal skills that served him the rest of his life.

Jim graduated from the University of Michigan with a B.S. Degree in 1967. Having already developed a love of percussion while in high school, he joined the Michigan Marching Band and spoke proudly of Michigan's football success that took him to the 1965 Rose Bowl in Pasadena, CA. He remained an avid college football fan forever.

Jim's University of Michigan graduate MBA courses were interrupted in the Spring of 1968 when he was drafted into the US Army. Thinking he was headed to the jungles of Vietnam he, instead, was diverted by special Pentagon order to work with the Safeguard Antibalistic Missile Program. He was given the highest level top secret security clearance allowing work with Critical Nuclear Weapons Design Information. Spending two years in the DC area, Jim grew to love Virginia, happy to be away from the cold and grey Ann Arbor winters. His military service introduced him to people and situations that influenced greatly his career decisions in the months following his discharge in 1970.

In spite of his dislike of the long Ann Arbor winters, Jim returned to Michigan after being invited to work at the Michigan Computing Center. He remained there for four years working as a research and teaching assistant, all the while building his interest in, and ideas for, problem solving using computer simulation software.

In 1974 Jim was happy to return to the DC area, having been offered a job with the large defense contractor, CACI. Within a year, however, he left CACI and founded Wolverine Software Corporation in order to pursue his goal of building a “better mousetrap” in the form of a more powerful simulation program than that previously introduced by IBM. His work in taking on the giant was successful and formed the solid foundation for Jim's future programs including simulation animation. Jim's work has remained prominent in the field of computer simulation for over four decades.

Jim taught graduate level courses for five years as an adjunct professor of computer science for Virginia Tech Northern Virginia Graduate Center. He has given numerous presentations on simulation at conferences, corporations, government organizations, and other universities around the world. His sense of humor was legendary, even when speaking his 2nd language, German. He was fond of saying, “If you are not part of the solution, you are part of the problem.” He had a clear vision of his goals and ideals, always raising the bar by seeking perfection.

Over the course of his career, Jim authored over 50 books and articles and was working currently on what would have been his last work. He was indebted to Jim Wilson for helping him so much in recent months as his health began to fail. Jim also would want to thank Bob Sargent for his on-going support when he most needed it, and Tom Schriber for his advice and friendship over more than half a century.

Of the many awards Jim received over his lifetime, he felt honored to have been selected Titan of the Year and Keynote Speaker for the Winter Simulation Conference held in Monterey, CA in 2006. In 2013, Jim was video interviewed as a Simulation Pioneer for the Computer Simulation Archive located at North Carolina State University Libraries. And, in December 2018, in Gothenburg, Sweden, Jim was given the prestigious Lifetime Professional Achievement Award by INFORMS, premier international computer society with over 10,000 members.

Jim also enjoyed a variety of activities outside his professional endeavors. He loved keeping fit and worked out regularly at a gym. He enjoyed competition on all levels and played a fierce game of racquetball. In earlier years he participated in sailboat races on the Chesapeake Bay. He was a hiker and a bicyclist who loved exploring new parks and trails. He loved his dogs, of which there were many over the years. Jim never gave up his love of classical music and volunteered in several concert bands, including the Virginia Grand Military Band, commuting back to Alexandria to play Timpani and other percussion at the Schlesinger Concert Hall and Arts Center.

Jim developed lasting professional relationships and loyal friendships all over the world. Known by all who met him for his brilliance, patience and kindness, Jim was a special man who made a difference in the world, his community, and in the individual lives of many.

Survivors include his wife, Judy (Merrill) Henriksen; his brother Richard (Rosemary) Henriksen of Traverse City, MI; brother in law, John Seelman of North Muskegon, MI; many nephews; and goddaughter niece, Christine (Robert) Koman of North Muskegon. His sister, Mary Ann Seelman predeceased him in 2013.

A private service for Jim will be held in June in Michigan. At a later date, a few close friends will gather in Alexandria to share a meal and memories.

Suggestions for donations in Jim's memory are the Lewes Fire Department, 347 E. Savannah Road, Lewes, DE 19958, Faithful Friends, Inc., 12 Germay Drive, Wilmington, DE 19804, or a charity of your choice.

Please sign the online guestbook located on this site.

Tribute Wall

RL

“ I was sorry to hear of Jim's passing. Jim and I were good friends during our Angell School years. I remember we took apart a pin ball machine in my basement to create a science project. He had a special mind for things like that. I also remember that we went to different colleges and kept in contact with each other. This may not sound unusual but we kept in contact by sending audio tapes through the mail. This was back in the early 60s, long before the internet. I'm sure Jim will be missed by those that knew him. Positive thoughts go out to his friends and family.

Bob Luhmann

Robert Luhmann - May 05, 2019 at 08:39 PM

CL

“ I met Jim when I was a young CCS grad student in Ann Arbor working on the MERIT network and he was a draftee working for Dick Merwin and Bruce Arden on the BMD programs. When he returned to Ann Arbor and headed the Computing Center consultants, I reported to him, and I enjoyed playing on the CC softball team with him. Later, his presence in the DC area helped Jurate and me relocate there, and when our son Peter was small, Jim took a photo of him riding on my shoulders and blew it up to poster size. It was on my office wall for years, and I still have it. Jim was a warm and loving human being, low key, but brilliant, and blessed with a sharp wit and a great story-telling ability. He was a force for good in my life and as these entries show, for many others. I miss him.

Carl Landwehr - May 03, 2019 at 03:29 PM

TS

“ Let me tell a small tale about Jim. Jim took a course from me in discrete-event simulation (using IBM's GPSS/360) in the MBA program at the University of Michigan in the Winter of 1968. Among the other 48 students in the course, Jim always sat in the back row, paying attention to the lectures but not saying a word, and with no interaction between us outside of class. Then one day, about five or six weeks into the course, Jim raised his hand and asked a penetrating question that surprised me to no end. That marked the beginning of what became our deep professional and personal friendship, right up to the onset of Jim's physical challenges and his eventual departure from this life. What an exceptionally multi-faceted person Jim Henriksen proved to be. Jim's precious wife, Judy, has the boundless sympathy of my wife and me. May Jim rest in peace. Tom Schriber

Thomas J Schriber - April 23, 2019 at 06:44 PM

CM

“ I met Jim, quite by accident, while walking our two King Charles Spaniels. Jim and Judy had recently moved to Lewes and were walking their own two King Charles Spaniels. We instantly connected. As I got to know Jim, I learned that we had a lot in common. Music has always been a big part of my life (including years playing the trumpet), but I was amazed by how far Jim had taken his talent: he was still playing timpani drums in various local orchestras. And while I, too, had majored in Statistics in college, Jim actually went on to become an accomplished expert in the field and start his own statistical research firm. From the time we met, we never disagreed on any topic, something I had never encountered with anyone else. Jim was easily the most intelligent person I've ever known, and I always looked forward to hearing his perspective on a variety of topics. When he told me about his diagnosis, he also asked me to promise to keep it to myself. Naturally, I agreed. Over time I learned to admire his courage and tenacity in fighting this cruel disease, and felt we grew even closer. While his heroic battle is over, and I'm grateful he is no longer suffering, I already miss him very much.
Chuck Mezger

Chuck Mezger - April 21, 2019 at 01:41 PM

RA

“ Amazing inside and out. I read his obit and did not realize that he had all of those accomplishments. He was a very humble and kind man and he will be missed.

-Rachel (nurse @ Pulmonologist office)

Rachel - April 17, 2019 at 05:00 PM

NF

“ We were fortunate to meet Jim a few years ago when our son Justin, also a percussionist, joined the Rehoboth Concert Band. Jim's wit and enthusiasm motivated our son to go to practice. Justin thought Jim was so smart and interesting, and he looked up to him. We are sorry they didn't get to spend more time together in the last few years. Jim and Justin would have had interesting conversations as Justin is now a Penn State student, a big rival of Michigan U. We send condolences to Jim's wife, Judy, and to the rest of his family. RIP Jim!

Nikky Fisher - April 17, 2019 at 10:33 AM

TS

“ About 25 years ago I had a chance to meet Jim directly. Before I had only read his excellent papers of simulation conferences. I found a new friend on our first meeting.

Jim was a wonderful person and extraordinarily open to others. I will always remember the time we spent together and the help he gave me. He was an outstanding researcher, producing revolutionary ideas and developing software at the highest level. He was my teacher and my idol in simulation. His algorithms are very famous. Generations of students have learned to use Wolverine products.

Dear Judy, I fondly recall our wonderful stays at your home in Alexandria, your warmth toward my father-in-law and me, and our many conversations on pleasant evenings during past Winter Simulation Conferences. My wife and I recall your stay in Magdeburg during the Fraunhofer IFF's 20th anniversary celebration with equal fondness. We are grateful for the hours spent together.

Dear Judy, you have lost a wonderful husband and the simulation community has lost a titan, but we all know that Jim will receive his rightful place in heaven.

Thomas Schulze, Magdeburg

Thomas Schulze - April 16, 2019 at 03:48 AM

AC

“ I am a member of the Virginia Grand Military Band, and while I did not know Jim, I wish to send my sincere condolences to his wife, family, and loved ones. Once I read his obituary, which was so thoughtfully and lovingly written, I was teary. What an extraordinary, brilliant, talented, and loved man he was to all around him. I hope that in time, you will be able to concentrate on the wonderful memories rather than the hurt and loss that you are feeling.

Sincerely, Alexandra (Sandra) Chappell

Alexandra (Sandra) Chappell - April 15, 2019 at 11:46 AM

JL

“ I met Jim when he became my boss at the University of Michigan Computing Center --- he was in charge of the Computing Center counsellors when I became a Computing Center counsellor. His wit and common sense were always much appreciated. Later, he arranged for an interview for me at CACI which led to my first job in the DC area (but like Jim, I left CACI within a year for another opportunity). I remember his love of music, and a well-spun story with a good punch-line, and trying to figure out how something really works, and always, the University of Michigan. And I well remember how happy Jim was when he met Judy in their townhouse community, and how their whole happy story together evolved. With deepest condolences to Judy and Jim's family, Jurate Maciunas Landwehr

Jurate Landwehr - April 14, 2019 at 10:30 PM

JS

“ Jim was a great friend and a real inspiration to me. Lots of us remember him as the coach of the Computing Center softball teams -- both men and coed. We had some really memorable times. I called him coach for the next 40 years, and only partly because of the softball team. I overlapped Jim in the Marching Band for his last 2 years (my first 2) and we talked band stories ever since. Most impactful to me, though, was his creation of GPSS/H, his compiler for GPSS. It ran 10 times faster than IBM's GPSS, and was the proof of concept I used when making a compiler for Verilog, another simulation language. When you know the idea is sound, it makes development a whole lot easier. Jim did it first. He was one of the (quiet) giants of the UM Computing Center -- a key contributor to making it the great place it was.

John Sanguinetti - April 14, 2019 at 08:57 PM

CW

“ Dinner parties, wine, laughter of Judy and my old school day tales from elementary and high school. Loved when Jim would hold us spell bound with a well delivered joke of his. I always had a joke for him but not as well told as his. We both had strong Scandinavian ancestry. His Norwegian mine Swedish. We kidded each other about this. George and I will miss you Jim and we will always remember our fun times.

Caryl Williams - April 13, 2019 at 10:41 AM

MA

“ With Jim I lose not only a brilliant business partner and an extraordinary customer-oriented software vendor. I lose a true friend. Without Jim, I would not be where I am today. It was Jim who introduced me to Gordon, who eventually hired me nearly 17 years ago.

Jim was that kind of guy who could "talk" to computers and make them do what HE wanted them to do. In nearly 2 decades I have been working with Jim, I never ran into a problem with SLX or Proof which he was not capable of fixing in the very same day.

Jim was not only a phenomenal programmer, he had also a great sense of humour. A couple of anecdotes from his presentations: in one, still using transparency sheets with an overhead projector, he had drawn a hand on the side of the sheet. We all thought it was his own hand, holding the sheet on the side. When he walked away from the sheet and the "hand" stayed, most of the people in the audience looked puzzled (myself included).

In another presentation, years later, he created an animation and the word SLX turned into the word SEX for a very short time every so many seconds. Again, most people in the audience thought they were having hallucinations.

I'd like to close this short memory with one of Jim's famous principles (from his Titans Speech "Taming the Complexity Dragon" at WSC): according to Jim, a good software needs to satisfy the "Principle of Least Astonishment", i.e. be intuitive and do not astonish the customer. An example of a violation of such principle? Going to START when you want to switch OFF a computer.

*Godspeed Jim, I will miss you. Judy, a big big hug to you.
Marco*

Marco - April 09, 2019 at 04:31 PM

GR

“ I'll never forget when Jim & Judy came all the way to Illinois to attend the funeral of my first wife, and then came over to my house to meet my relatives. Jim rendered my mother-in-law speechless when he said he learned how to swim when his parents threw him in the water. When my mother-in-law exclaimed "How terrible..." Jim replied in classic JOH humor "it wasn't so bad...once I got out the bag I was in, the rest was easy." All who knew Jim has a JOH story and all will miss him. Gordon Rehn

Gordon Rehn - April 09, 2019 at 01:08 AM

NS

*Sending sincerest condolences to Judy and the entire Henriksen family. Indeed Jim was brilliant man who touched many with whom he worked and played. Sincerely,
Nancy Spillane -*

Nancy Spillane - May 20, 2019 at 09:17 PM



I first became aware of Jimmy, the little kid next door, when I "caught" his fox terrier with my casting rod and a little block of wood. Skipper was having a great time fighting me as if he was a 12 pound fish! Neither of us knew when to stop, until poor Skipper was totally exhausted and prostrate on the grass. But Jimmy and I were good friends, and played lots of basketball in the alley behind his garage with his classmate Barry Bess. I knew these were bright kids, and am not at all surprised at these -new to me- amazing computer business stories. His big sister Mary Ann was my best friend from diaper age. I visited her and shared our 8mm childhood movies after she became very ill several years ago. I will miss them both.

David A. Carlson - October 22, 2019 at 03:35 PM

RC

Jim is giant among men. His work has left an indelible mark

Raymond Chiu - December 07, 2020 at 02:51 PM