

## **2005 Distinguished Service Award**

Presented to John Taormina in recognition of his many contributions to the field of visual resources through demonstrated leadership, research, and publication, as well as his long-term service to professional organizations and institutions.

Presented this Monday, 7th day of March, 2005 in Miami Beach, Florida

### **John Taormina's Remarks:**

I would very much like to thank those who nominated me for this award, Karin Whalen and Jenni Rodda, whom I first got to know well while working with them on the Executive Board. Those Board years together have since led to fruitful collaborations on conference sessions, workshops, committees, and special projects, just like many other relationships in the VRA lead to new ventures.

Thank you to the many members who wrote letters to support this nomination, an effort that certainly reached back through the years. Even my departmental Acting Chair last semester, Annabel Wharton, was involved. Such testimonials brought back fond memories of working with these colleagues during the past two decades. Although not everyone is present tonight, including myself, most are here in spirit. I am grateful for their friendship and collegiality.

Thank you to the members of the Awards Committee who recommended me for not one but two awards this year. I am most honored to have been able to share the Nancy DeLaurier Award tonight with my Summer Educational Institute Co-chair Mary Wassermann. Educational programs are one of the most important benefits of being a member of the Association and the Summer Educational Institute will evolve as needed to serve the membership through the ensuing years.

To our Executive Board, all I can say is that good things do happen when you follow a committee's recommendations.

Receiving the Distinguished Service Award is a very humbling experience when you realize who has already received it. There is no greater honor than being recognized by your peers, for the simple fact that your peers know exactly what you go through every day and can appreciate your efforts more than anyone else.

In addition to being the eighteenth recipient of the Distinguished Service Award, I am also in the position of being the first male in the Association to receive it. When I started out in the VRA I think the number of men in the Association could be counted on one hand. Now, we are all balding or graying, but it is gratifying to look at the membership and see that it

takes a few hands to count the men now. Diversity in all forms makes us a far stronger and much more interesting organization.

I have no doubt that stepping down as Editor of the VRA Bulletin was the catalyst for this award. For those of you who are relatively new to the VRA, you probably don't know that the VRA Bulletin started out as something called the International Bulletin for the Photodocumentation of the Visual Arts. In its first issues, it was a photocopied, stapled pamphlet; during recent years we have often exceeded one hundred printed and bound pages per issue, reflecting a steady increase in Association activity.

There have only been two Bulletin editors so far in the Association's history: Joy Blouin, long at the University of Michigan, and myself—who trotted the editorial office from Ohio State University, back to the University of Michigan, then to Duke University, where it has been for the past five years. Those three institutions well deserve the Association's gratitude. By my calculations, they have collectively contributed to the VRA in-kind release time for me exceeding the equivalent of over \$100,000 during a nine-year period, in addition to significant contributions of space and equipment use.

The core Bulletin editorial staff—my VRA Core so to speak—of Mark Pompelia, Astrid Otey, and Adrienne Varady—has been with me from the beginning, when we started out as colleagues in Ohio. Working together with the contributing editors and authors over the past nine volumes, we edited, rewrote, marked up, and produced over 2,200 pages of printed text. That is no small accomplishment. I thank them for their dedication, editorial expertise, and exceedingly good humor.

My one suggestion as outgoing Bulletin editor is that more members of the Association need to write articles for our print journal. Developing an evaluated body of literature pertinent to our profession disseminates and archives our collective knowledge for colleagues now and for the future.

I don't think it is a coincidence that there have only been two Bulletin editors to date. I cannot imagine a more rewarding professional experience than having edited the Bulletin. I thank you all for the opportunity to have done so.

I must confess now that my service to the Association has not been totally altruistic. I have actually been very selfish over the years. By starting or chairing a chapter, by working on or chairing a committee, by editing the Bulletin, by serving on the Executive Board, I gained the opportunity to work side-by-side with some of the best minds of our profession. What better way to grow in the discipline? For around \$100 each year, I get to benefit from the collective expertise of our membership through our print and online publications, website, listserv, and conferences. It's the best deal in the world!

Serving in various capacities in the Association also has an added benefit. Members that you have worked with on committees or in chapters or on Boards often become your friends. You watch them get married; watch them buy their first and, often, second houses; watch their children grow up and graduate; you vacation with them, and drink lots of wine

with them; you share your blood orange marmalade or Southern grits recipes with them. You even get to complain about those dastardly Harry Potter villains with them!

It is a strange thing to have started this career in 1982, still in graduate school, at the naïve age of twenty-five—the same year that the Visual Resources Association was born. It has developed into an odd, almost familial, relationship. When the Association celebrates its silver anniversary in two years, I not only celebrate my twenty-five years in the visual resources profession but also get to turn twice as old. I think the VRA is coming out ahead on that one.

I am the luckiest person around. I get to be surrounded by all of you at our conferences and chapter meetings and then I get to benefit from your personal and professional generosity the rest of the year.

Thank you very much for this significant professional honor and a very special evening, albeit via long distance. What an interesting oral history all of this will make!

John J. Taormina

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