

Dezso Devenyi (1948 - 2009): in remembrance of an ALADIN pioneer

We were in the middle of a discussion about the optimal setting of an ALADIN Rapid Update Cycle in Hungary, when suddenly in the evening of the 27th of November the shocking news arrived from Boulder: Dezso had suddenly died of a heart attack the evening before. We immediately asked each other: is it true? We could not imagine that he might not conclude the discussion. Or maybe he really left us, abruptly with many brilliant ideas and solutions in his mind! After a while, we had to understand that no more answers would come from Boulder...only the ideas, thoughts behind him... We had just met him in Budapest and in Reading a few weeks previously: we had a great time discussing serious issues in numerical weather prediction and we had (as usual) fun with everything, which is related to NWP and life (because for him life and work, science and fun were in the closest relationship). He seemed to be in the same good form as always in the past 20 years of our friendship. We could enjoy his special sense of humour, always sarcastic about himself and about everything surrounding him (we extremely enjoyed to have the direct translation of Hungarian words into English, which resulted in funny neologies). We really appreciated his great knowledge in general, and numerical weather prediction, in particular. He was full of energy and plans. On his way back to Boulder, he stopped in Reading for a few days to discuss at ECMWF some issues on how humidity assimilation can be improved, and how cloud and rain-affected satellite data can be used in the analysis. He was keen to attend a live Premier League football match (his great concern was always that good football matches were not on American TV) and to lose himself in the mathematics books of Oxford bookstores. Recently he developed a special interest in differential geometry. Then he returned to the States and we continued the discussions, which now will not be finished...

Dezso was a great teacher of numerical weather prediction for an entire generation of Hungarian meteorologists. From the time when he was our teacher, later as our boss and also remotely from Boulder for us personally he was a very good friend and our greatest mentor or in other word our „MESTER” (master in English) as he used to call us ironically time-to-time.

His main scientific interest dates back to the mid-seventies when he was a post-graduate student of the famous Prof. Lev Gandin in St Petersburg (back then, Leningrad). That is how Dezso started his rich scientific career with studying the objective analysis of meteorological fields by optimum interpolation. He had a pioneering role in Hungary in establishing the first numerical weather prediction suite of the Hungarian Meteorological Service (through cooperation with the Swedish Meteorological and Hydrological Institute) and afterwards he was continuously supporting numerical weather prediction activities in Hungary. He is one of the three pioneers from Central Europe, who visited Météo France in Paris in March 1991 to discuss and assess the feasibility of the LAM-ARPEGE project, which later became known as ALADIN. Though, later on, Dezso did not get directly involved in the development of the ALADIN model, he was always a strong supporter of the project.

During his long career at the Hungarian Meteorological Service, Dezso, being a gifted scientist and a popular personality, took different responsibilities (among them being the deputy-director of the Service), but ultimately wished to return to his favourite subject: data assimilation. This came true when at his mid-forties he made the brave step to say good-bye to his well established career at home and decided to move to Boulder, Colorado where he could work on just what he loved most: doing research in data assimilation, playing a key role in building a state of the art numerical weather prediction system. Dezso was one of the leading data assimilation experts at NOAA/ESRL, where he worked on the assimilation segment of the Rapid Update Cycle and most recently on the new system called Rapid Refresh (RR). For a short while, he interrupted his stay in Boulder and he was working at the University Eotvos Lorand, Budapest as well. He was also a popular and highly acknowledged personality at FSL, (later ESRL) and he continuously kept contacts with European (and especially) Hungarian scientists and colleagues. It just means that many of us will miss him tremendously, but we will always remember him as the “father” of numerical weather prediction in Hungary, a colleague who never forgot his “roots” in Hungary, and a friend to whom we could always address questions being sure to get the most appropriate answers almost immediately.

Dezso leaves behind his wife Mary, his daughter Patricia and his dog Zseni. We share their grief in these difficult times.

Gabor Radnoti and Andras Horanyi
6th December, 2009