In memory of Tibor Szentiványi

One of the pioneers of computing in Hungary, Tibor Szentiványi passed away on 23 April 2009.

Born in Budapest in 1931, he obtained his diploma in Electrical Engineering from the Budapest University of Technology in 1958. Right from the beginning he went in for automated data processing and computing. Still at university, he joined work ongoing at a state company aiming to develop punched card equipment then in short supply in the country. In 1955 he was involved in the early experimental work done at the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (MTA) with the intention to design the first domestic electronic computing device. From 1958 on he participated in the building at MTA's newly established cybernetics research group of the first stored-program, electronic valve digital computer in Hungary, codenamed M3. His task was to connect magnetic drum and tape devices to it. Subsequently he was Chief Technical Officer at one of two installations running the first transistorized computers (Elliot 803B) in the country.

In 1965 he joined KSH, the Central Statistical Office, then acting as the government department responsible for the computerization of state administration. Heading the technical department of KSH's Information Processing Laboratory (shortnamed Infelor by him), his initial responsibilities included providing technical support for the operations and modernization of the Laboratory's Russian built Minsk as well as studying contemporary modern computer architecture and educate young professionals in this field. At a later stage he became the driving force behind organizing software export at the Laboratory and providing thereby an opportunity for Hungarian brainware to appear on the European informatics market. As the manager of international relations, he pursued similar activities at SZÁMKI, a research institute established in 1975 as the successor to Infelor. After his retirement he helped organise international relations at Hungarian Post. Besides, he held regular lectures at the Denis Gabor College specializing in informatics training.

While serving the cause of ITC in various managerial and senior staff member positions over the decades, he had a significant role in promoting the voluntary cooperation of professionals and in establishing communities to facilitate it. He was instrumental in founding the Hungarian computer society in 1968 and proposed it be named after John v. Neumann. In the early stages he was chairman of the Society's hardware technical committee. Later he increasingly became interested in communications and this was reflected in his joining the TC6 of IFIP as the Hungarian representative. His activities earned him international recognition. One of his outstanding achievements was the staging in Hungary the series of COMNET TC6 working conferences (1977, 1981, 1985, 1990). These conferences, for which he acted as OC chairman, were highly successful not just from the scientific angle but also because they provided opportunities for professionals from Hungary and other so-called Eastern countries to meet and establish personal ties with their Western peers. In recognition of his services he was honoured in 1983 with the IFIP Silver Core Award and was eventually elected honorary member of TC6.

Although an engineer in grain, his interests extended to the domains of humanities and culture history, too. He was intrigued by linguistics, but his favourite field of interest was games and puzzles. From the invention in 1977 of the Rubic Cube, he helped make it known worldwide and acted as chief organizer of the first Rubic Cube World Championship in 1982 in Budapest. Also in 1982 he founded the Club of Logic Players (later Meleda Club) and in 1987 the Hungarian Games Society of which he was president for ten years running.