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ALOP team wins SPIE Educator Award for bringing light through hands-on training

14 February 2011

TRIESTE, Italy, and BELLINGHAM, Washington, USA -- The Active Learning in Optics and Photonics team (ALOP) has won the 2011 SPIE Educator Award in recognition of the team's achievements in bringing basic optics and photonics training to teachers in the developing world.

The award was recognized by SPIE President Katarina Svanberg, professor of oncology at Lund University, on 8 February during the Winter College on Optics and Photonics at the Abdus Salam International Centre for Theoretical Physics (ICTP) in Trieste.

Under the auspices of the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the ALOP team has literally brought light to more than 400 physics teachers from 45 countries through hands-on optics and photonics workshops, inspiring a new generation of scientists in those nations.

The ALOP team has presented 13 workshops since the program's launch in 2003 with support from the ICTP, SPIE, UNESCO, and other organizations.

The team is comprised of volunteers from around the world. Those being recognized with the SPIE Educator Award are:

- Minella Alarcon, UNESCO, France
- Zohra Ben-Lakhdar, University El Manaur, Tunisia
- Ivan Culaba, Ateneo de Manila University, Philippines
- Vasudevan Lakshminarayanan, University of Waterloo, Canada
- Joel Maquiling, Ateneo de Manila University, Philippines
- Alex Mazzolini, Swinburne University of Technology, Australia
- Joseph Niemela, Abdus Salam International Centre for Theoretical Physics, Italy
- David Sokoloff, University of Oregon, USA.

The workshops train high-school and introductory-level university physics teachers in developing countries through active-learning workshops utilizing simple, locally available materials.

Afterward, participants are encouraged to organize workshops to train more teachers in their regions, as well as to teach the optics and photonics lessons in their classrooms.

"Young people in developing countries often do not have access to education beyond the primary grades, and when they do their science education may be greatly hampered by lack of equipment and computer technology," said María Yzuel, SPIE Past President and professor of physics at Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona. "ALOP's hands-on approach makes science much more accessible to the people of developing nations. Since science education has been shown to be a critical component of a nation's economic development, the ALOP team has been providing an important first step in helping the people in these countries work towards economic independence."

"Each member of the ALOP team is an outstanding, innovative educator, able to transfer knowledge to people from different cultures and to induce students to learn from their own experience and analysis of their own observations," said Angela Guzmán, research associate professor at Florida Atlantic University and professor emeritus at the Universidad Nacional de Colombia.

The Educator Award is given annually in recognition of outstanding contributions to optics education by SPIE instructors or educators in optics

and photonics, and includes a \$2,000 honorarium.

For more information on this year's recipients and past winners, see www.SPIE.org/x3069.xml.

[SPIE](#), the international society for optics and photonics, was founded in 1955 to advance light-based technologies. Serving more than 180,000 constituents from 168 countries, the Society advances emerging technologies through interdisciplinary information exchange, continuing education, publications, patent precedent and career and professional growth. SPIE annually organizes and sponsors approximately 25 major technical forums, exhibitions and education programs in North America, Europe, Asia and the South Pacific, and supports scholarships, grants and other education programs around the world.

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