

Message from VIS 2020 General Chairs

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VIS 2020 General Chairs

To say that 2020 will be a year that we will never forget is probably an understatement. We exited IEEE VIS 2019 in Vancouver with excitement that IEEE VIS would be held in Salt Lake City! When brainstorming on how to make this time memorable, we were concerned about matching the great experience of past years and did not know that future circumstances would create memorable challenges for us all — whether we wanted it or not. We assembled a team from community members and set our course towards a traditional, on-site conference to be held in October 2020. Then, during the early part of 2020, we all came face-to-face with what Thomas Friedman announced in 2005 — “The World Is Flat” and globalization is making all of us closely connected. As the COVID-19 pandemic spread around the globe, we were faced with the question of whether IEEE VIS 2020 should go forward, and, if so, how. After seeking community input, the overwhelming response was that “The show must go on!” (not literally, but you get the point). It is during times of turmoil and travail that communities either fall apart or rise to the occasion. We were fortunate to witness how our community came together to make IEEE VIS 2020 a conference we will never forget — and for all the right reasons! Even though people were juggling with forced closures, modified teaching, new work schedules, work from home challenges, and, in some cases, COVID-19 itself, the dedication of our community allowed most to adjust to the new situation, help each other, and contributed to the conference with a large number

of high-quality submissions. Volunteers also followed by implementing a highly selective peer-reviewed review process within a much tighter time schedule. Overall we received over 586 submissions across our three conference tracks. Of those submissions, 147 were accepted for presentation. Because of the uniqueness of the situation, we decided to make 2020 a year of ‘firsts’:

- For the first time, our conference will be fully virtual, streamed online;
- For the first time, we will have a Nobel prize awardee as our opening keynote address;
- For the first time, we will have industry keynotes enriching our technical program;
- For the first time, our conference will be free for all attendees; and
- For the first time, all the content will be freely available during the time of the meeting.

Indeed, IEEE VIS 2020 will be a conference we will never forget. We would like to conclude by expressing our appreciation to all the people that made the conference possible. As General Chairs, we acknowledge that we are somewhat like the conductor of an orchestra in that we are the only members of the orchestra that do not contribute directly to its sound! If IEEE VIS 2020 turned into a symphony, we owe it to the tremendous effort of the committee members and the engagement of our community.