The Award for Meritorious Contributions to Neuropathology recognizes a member who has made significant contributions to the advancement of knowledge in neuropathology and provided service to the American Association of Neuropathologists. Each recipient of the award is nominated by the President, in conjunction with the Nominating Committee and with the approval of the Executive Council. The qualities of outstanding scientific achievement and service are embodied in this year’s recipients, Drs. Joseph E. Parisi and Jeannette J. Townsend. They join the rich roster of distinguished former award recipients.

Awards for Meritorious Contributions to Neuropathology

Longstanding members of the American Association of Neuropathologists know Joseph E. Parisi, MD, as the personification of meritorious service. Those of more recent vintage have heard numerous words of praise and thanks showered upon Joe every year at these meetings. Those who are new, or from (very) far away, will learn that Joe is the heart, soul, and (most obviously) the backbone of our Association. He has held virtually every office and served on nearly every committee in the AANP, usually continuing to assist with their duties long after his official commitments were served.

Born to Italian immigrant parents who arrived during the height of the Great Depression, Joe was imbued with the twin values of hard work and service to one’s family and community. He completed college and medical school in his hometown of Syracuse, New York, where his senior neurosurgery rotation included meeting Christine Piscone, a medical social worker. They were married a year later, while Joe was interning in Surgery at the University of Pennsylvania. They returned to Syracuse for Joe’s neurosurgery residency, which included a rotation in neuropathology with Drs. George Collins and Ronald Kim. Joe saw the light, and joined both the Department of Pathology and the American Association of Neuropathologists. As he completed professional training, Joe’s fatherhood training commenced with the birth of his first son, David. Owning the dubious honor of being the very last participant in the Berry Plan, Joe was assigned to

Dr. Joseph E. Parisi

Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington, D.C., where his second son, Thomas, was born a year later. In 1982, Lt. Col. Parisi began an eight-year tenure as Director of the Neuropathology Fellowship Training Program at the AFIP, an institution from which he received much and to which he has given even more (Joe was recently asked to chair the AFIP advisory board). While at the AFIP, Joe served as consultant to several sections of the NIH as well as to local hospitals and the medical examiner’s office. Joe’s indefatigable work ethic did not escape the Mayo Clinic, who wooed him to assume the Directorship of their outstanding Neuropathology Fellowship Training Program (from which many of our finest members received their training), and quickly rose to the rank of Professor. Last year, the physicians at Mayo Clinic expressed their esteem by electing Joe to the Officers and Councilors at Mayo.

Joe’s fascination with the nervous system is well documented in the breadth and depth of his investigations into neurological diseases. His first publication appeared in Brain, and his debut first-authorship graced the pages of the New England Journal of Medicine. The pedal has never left the metal, with hundreds of publications (virtually all in top-shelf journals) including seminal works on neuro-oncology, vasculitis, multiple sclerosis, and neurodegenerative disease. His wide ranging expertise has been recognized by Editorial Board memberships (both JNEN and Acta Neuropathologica), a position on the American Board of Pathology’s Neuropathology Test Committee, and Advisory Panel membership for the FDA. His book, Principles and Practice of Neuropathology (now in its 2nd edition), is the only general neuropathology textbook I keep in my office, and the one I recommend most often to residents. According to past fellows, Joe has an uncanny eye for gross neuropathology, and takes the finest photographs this side of Yosemite.

Throughout his career, Joe has assumed the Directorship of their outstanding Neuropathology Fellowship Training Program (from which many of our finest members received their training), and quickly rose to the rank of Professor. Last year, the physicians at Mayo Clinic expressed their esteem by electing Joe to the Officers and Councilors at Mayo.

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Throughout his career, Joe has remained a dedicated family man. He and Chris have seen David graduate with...
degrees in Fine Arts and Writing, and Thomas with degrees in Biology and Violin Performance. Joe has also been a tireless ombudsman for his “family” of neuropathologists through his active participation and advocacy in the College of American Pathologists. In his spare time (!), Joe plays violin with the Mayo Medical Center Chamber Symphony and restores old mechanical musical instruments. He is a member in good standing of the Sherlock Holmes Society of London, collects movie posters, and enjoys watching classic Hollywood films. Joe should know that Humphrey Bogart spoke for all of us when he said, “Even though it doesn’t take much to see that the problems of a few hundred neuropathologists don’t amount to a hill of beans in this crazy world, we’ll always have Parisi.”

Though his tireless devotion to both career and family makes Joe the very model of a modern neuropathologist, all who have had the good fortune to work with Joe know him as a warm and caring individual, who has given at least one of us the sport coat off of his back. I’m sure Joe’s parents would be proud to see how assiduously he exemplifies their lessons of dedication and devotion; and that Chris, David, and Thomas share our joy in recognizing Joe with the American Association of Pathologist’s Meritorious Service Award.

Mark L. Cohen, MD

Dr. Jeannette J. Townsend, who has long been active in the AANP, recently retired as Director of the Neuropathology program at the University of Utah, Salt Lake City, after an illustrious career and is now a Professor Emeritus. She is receiving the Meritorious Service Award today for the many ways that she has unselfishly served our own society on committees and in the leadership positions that are necessary to make our organization function.

But Jeannette’s career at her home institution has also been marked by extraordinary service—particularly to resident and medical student education. One of her most enduring legacies has been her innovative contributions to Web-based neuropathology teaching. Her system, Neuropathology Illustrated 2.0, is a CD-ROM developed as a self-study tool for residents studying for board examinations. It contains over 1,200 images of disease processes, accompanied by descriptions and “interactive clickable text to illustrate the salient features in each image,” as well as neuroanatomy and neuroimaging tutorials. Many students of neuropathology around the world are already very familiar with, and will continue to consult, the Web as their primary source for neuropathology information—and each and every one of them already gravitates to the website developed several years ago by the University of Utah and Dr. Townsend.

Dr. Townsend’s academic training prepared her well for her distinguished career. She received her baccalaureate degree from Stanford University, her MD at the University of California, San Francisco, and her training in anatomic pathology (1971–1973) and neuropathology (1973–1975) at the University of California, San Francisco. She studied under Drs. Surl Nielsen and Nathan Malamud and stayed on the faculty at UCSF until she was successfully lured away by the University of Utah, where she was recruited as an associate professor in 1982. She quickly rose at Utah to full professor in 1988 and remained there for almost 25 years.

Jeannette’s academic contributions to the literature have been diverse. In her 130+ publications between 1975 and 2006, she has “traveled” through many topics. That she is able to publish so extensively—and in so many areas—is a tribute to her all-around excellence as a diagnostician. At the University of Utah, Jeannette did it all—surgical neuropathology, autopsy neuropathology, and signing out muscle and nerve biopsies. And she was the sole neuropathology resource not only for the state of Utah, but for the entire Mountain West region. For years she maintained a very large consultative practice that served pathologists in Utah, Idaho, Montana, and Nevada. One of the features that particularly made her a great diagnostic neuropathologist was her depth of knowledge in clinical neurology. She was a regular attendee at national neurology meetings and local neurology Grand Rounds, and often shared challenging cases with her eminent neuropathologist husband, Dr. Richard Baringer. She trained both Dr. Cheryl Palmer and Dr. Cindy Welsh while at Utah and, as Dr. Palmer notes, Jeannette knew more clinical neurology than many of the neurology residents in the program! Her service to resident teaching at University of Utah was formally acknowledged by her receipt of the Departmental Teaching Award twice from Pathology and once from Neurology.

Jeannette authored numerous papers on brain tumors in conjunction with clinical colleagues at Utah and with members of the Southwest Oncology Group, for whom she served as central reviewer for a number of years. But she also published on neurodegenerative disorders (spinocerebellar ataxia type 7), developmental disorders (aprosencephaly, extracranial heterotopias, cerebellar anomalies, and acalvaria), pituitary adenomas, and cerebrovascular diseases. A recurring theme of her work, however, has always been central nervous system infections. Her important studies on herpes simplex infection were conducted from 1982 to 1990 when she was the principal investigator on a National Institute of Neurologic Disorders and Stroke grant. We at the AANP remember her best for her outstanding presidential symposium on CNS infections when she was President of the AANP in 1998–1999. We also recall one of the most memorable AANP meetings of all time,
the Salt Lake meeting that she hosted in 1993 with a barbecue on the ski slopes of Snow Bird.

But the service to the AANP for which she perhaps most richly deserves this Meritorious Award is for her labors as Secretary-Treasurer from 1992–1997. It is not a chance occurrence that both recipients of the Meritorious Service Award this year have toiled as Secretary-Treasurer of our organization. There are no other positions in the AANP that require such an extensive, and extended, time commitment from a single individual as that of Secretary-Treasurer. Anyone who has served as a committee or program chairperson for the AANP at our annual meetings knows how much work is involved in that job. Now multiply that by 10- to 100-fold and you have an idea of what it takes to be the Secretary Treasurer! Perhaps sainthood would be more appropriate than a Meritorious Service Award for someone like Jeannette who has served the AANP as Secretary-Treasurer...

It was overwhelmingly clear to the committee this year that Dr. Jeannette Townsend should be a recipient of this award. We congratulate her and her family—husband Dr. Richard Baringer, and her daughter, son-in-law, and newborn grandson, Joshua—on her lifetime achievements and contributions to the field of neuropathology and to the AANP. Jeannette will hardly be bored in retirement as she loves to travel, exercise, and learn foreign languages. She is already fluent in French and is currently tackling Mandarin Chinese—we wish her the best!

B.K. Kleinschmidt-DeMasters, MD