



**US Army Corps
of Engineers**
Engineer Research and
Development Center

News Release

Release No. A-09-08 Contact: Jackie Bryant

For Release: Oct. 24, 2008

Phone: (703) 428-6655

Topographic Engineering Center • 7701 Telegraph Road • Alexandria, VA 22315-3864 • <http://www.erd.usace.army.mil>

Stephen Benzek wins ESRI People's Choice Award

ALEXANDRIA, Va. – Stephen Benzek's imaginative creation of a noncontemporary, nontraditional-style map of the Mediterranean region recently won the prestigious People's Choice Award during the 28th Annual Environmental Systems Research Institute Inc. (ESRI) International User Conference. Benzek's map "The Geography of Paul" was chosen from more than 1,000 entries and voted by more than 17,000 conference attendees to receive the top prize.

Benzek is a physical scientist with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' Engineer Research and Development Center's (ERDC) Topographic Engineering Center (TEC).

Although this was his first time attending the conference, "I knew that everyone else's map would be contemporary with the typical infrastructure of roads, pipelines, water systems. I wanted to do something different," Benzek said. "What makes the map unique is that I created it in a style that resembles an ancient map. It has very few colors and looks like it's drawn on parchment paper. The location of the cities, shorelines and boundaries are all accurate and cartographically correct and the symbols are mathematically proportioned. It's a map you could lay on top of a modern map and the cities and geography would still be the same," Benzek said.

The map's initial creation was intended as part of a cartography project Benzek was assigned while attending long-term training at the University of the Redlands, Redlands, Calif. His master's thesis "Spatially Interactive Literature Analysis System (SILAS): An Interactive Tool to Study the Narrative Landscape of Ancient Texts" included a web application using ESRI's Arc GIS Server in addition to the award-winning map which he created with both ArcMap and Adobe Photoshop. "SILAS is a way for religious studies students with limited cartographic knowledge to have the ability to read ancient text, while also having the capability to plot and map trade routes, locate major port cities and determine how people traveled during the Roman Empire," Benzek said.



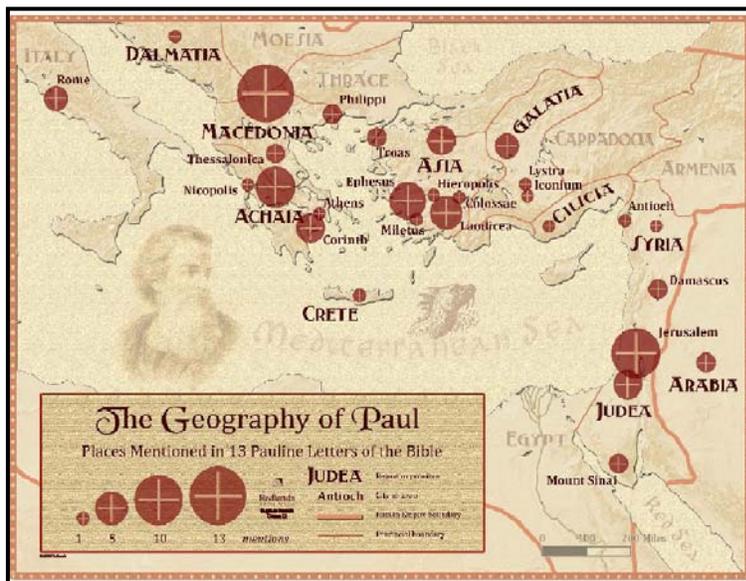
Stephen Benzek (left) was presented with the People's Choice Award during a recent visit to TEC by ESRI president Jack Dangermond. (Photo by Michael Timms, ERDC-TEC)

-MORE-

2/2/2

After compiling the data, Benzek completed the map in approximately 12 hours over two weeks. “TEC afforded me a great opportunity to attend long-term training. I wouldn’t have been able to acquire the skills to create a map like this and win this award had they not done so. I encourage any other TEC employees who have the opportunity to apply for long-term training so they can learn new skills and make a difference.”

Benzek is the recipient of the 2008 Association of American Geographers Conference Amy Mathers Student Scholarship Award. In 2005, he received the ERDC Director’s Award for Excellence in Operational Support, ERDC Director’s Award for Technical Support Achievement Award, the TEC Director’s Award for Operational Support and the TEC Director’s Award for Administrative and Technical Support.



Benzek’s map won the Map Gallery People’s Choice Award.

TEC provides the warfighter with a superior knowledge of the operational environmental and supports the nation’s civil and environmental initiatives through research, development, and the application of expertise in the topographic and related sciences. The ERDC is the premier research and development facility for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, consisting of seven laboratories at four geographical sites with more than 2,000 employees and an annual research program exceeding \$1 billion. It conducts research in both military and civil works mission areas for the Department of Defense and the nation.