

Jim Houston

Pioneering entertainment industry engineer James “Jim” Houston passed away due to cardiac arrest on 26 March 2020 in Pasadena, CA, at the age of 61. A 34-year veteran of the entertainment industry, Houston held senior engineering positions with several studios and prominent post-production facilities, including Sony Pictures Entertainment, Pacific Title & Art, Walt Disney Feature Animation, and since February of this year, with Samsung Research America. He was also a prominent member of many industry organizations, including the Hollywood Section of SMPTE. An expert in motion-imaging standards, computer animation, and digital restoration, he won two academy awards for scientific and engineering achievement.

Houston was born in Philadelphia, PA, and graduated from Cornell University. He began his career with Gould Computer Systems and worked at National Aeronautics Space Administration’s (NASA’s)



Ames Research Center before getting his start in Hollywood as a technical director with Walt Disney Feature Animation in 1986. In 1992, he won the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences (AMPAS) Scientific and Engineering Award, as part of the team that developed the Computer Animated Production System (CAPS) for film animation. His second such honor came in 2007 for his contributions to the Rosetta process used in digital restoration. In 2014, he was awarded

the SMPTE’s Technicolor/Herbert T. Kalmus Award for leadership and contributions in the application of digital technologies to motion picture production processes. He served as the co-chair of AMPAS’s Academy Color Encoding System (ACES) Project Committee and was a member of its Science and Technology Council.

Brian Gaffney, Chair of SMPTE, Hollywood, said Houston made important contributions to the technical side of the entertainment industry. “He was a founding member of the ACES committee,” Gaffney noted. “He wrote influential papers on topics ranging from the color fidelity of high dynamic range images to design considerations for cinemas using laser projection. He attended every industry technical and social event and was a constant presence in the community. He will be missed, and his legacy will last forever in Hollywood.”

Houston is survived by his mother, Margaret Houston, and his siblings John, Michael, Martin, Kevin, and Cathy, and their families.

Courtesy Inter-Society Digital Cinema Forum (ISDCF) 

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