

Richard Ruffino dies

News of Richard Ruffino's sudden death on April 17 at the age of 37 came as a great shock to the world of machine translation. He died after a brief illness.

A native of Rochester in New York state, he joined Xerox Corporation's newly formed translation division in nearby Webster in 1979, where he immediately applied his expertise in modern languages and linguistics to the tailoring of the Systran system for the corporation's special requirements.

In close collaboration with members of Dr Peter Toma's team at World Translation Center, La Jolla, California, he coordinated the highly successful development of a controlled vocabulary and syntax version of the English-source system for translation into five target languages while managing dictionary build-up by his own team of linguists in Webster.

As a result of these efforts, the Xerox Corporation now translates 90% of its technical documentation (approximately 55,000 pages per year) into four or five languages with the assistance of Systran, cutting product release dates for foreign markets from several months to a few days.

Richard Ruffino's interest in machine translation extended to the evaluation of other systems such as ALPS and to the preparation of time-cost studies for related development projects. He had spoken about subjects such as Controlled English at various conventions, including that of the American Translators Association.

Not only was he an extremely clear report writer but was an imposing speaker at international conferences in the United States and Europe. As recently as last February, he addressed an audience of 200 at the Systran conference in Luxembourg. The underlying message in all his communications was that machine translation had inherent limitations but that if these were accepted, highly efficient tools could be developed for specific purposes.

All who have had the pleasure of working with him, Jan Pigott told *Language Monthly*, will remember Richard for his sound analysis of technical problems, for his modest yet convincing style, and, of course, for

the excellent relations he enjoyed with his colleagues everywhere. The excellent personal relationship he had with machine translation specialists everywhere is confirmed by his colleague Peter DeMauro, of the Xerox Corporation, in a tribute which will be published in the next issue of the *ATA Chronicle*, journal of the American Translators Association.