



# NOTIS NEWS

Volume 17, No. 4 AUTUMN2004

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## From the NOTIS President, Larissa Kulinich

Dear Members,

Following the decision of the NOTIS Board of Directors to keep the Membership informed of current plans and activities on a regular basis, I would like to update you on the latest developments.

The highlights that I am going to focus on are as follows:

- Merging the NOTIS and WITS Newsletters
- Discontinuing the NOTIS Print Directory
- Responding to the Membership Satisfaction Survey
- Membership Drive
- Preparation for the 2005 ATA Conference in Seattle

At the NOTIS Board Meeting on September 15, 2004 where WITS President Sam Mattix was present, a decision was made to merge the NOTIS and WITS Newsletters, which passed unanimously. The WITS Board has also approved this merger and we are looking forward to working more closely together to improve our organizations.

The rationale underlying this decision included a number of factors. First, many WITS members are also members

of NOTIS, and so there is a great deal of "cross-over" in information, issues of interest, and activities that equally concern both organizations. Second, the merger is expected to be a benefit to both organizations for financial reasons, since NOTIS and WITS are going to split the cost. And finally, a more representative community of translators and interpreters is likely to generate and contribute more diverse and pertinent topics to the joint Newsletter the first issue of which is scheduled to come out in February 2005. Let us wish it a good start! I would encourage you to provide your input and insights as well as materials for publication.

Another big decision was made at the Board Meeting on September 15. We are discontinuing the NOTIS Print Directory! We are fully aware that the Print Directory has been a powerful advertising tool for our members, and it was not a quick and easy decision to make, but we feel confident that we are moving in the right direction for our membership.

In January 2004 the Print Directory Committee put together a very thorough and detailed proposal which was approved by the Board. According to the proposed schedule, the Print Directory was to be published by December 2004. But un-

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**Northwest Translators and Interpreters  
Society**

A chapter of the  
**American Translators Association**

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*NOTIS NEWS* is published in February, May, August, and November. Letters to the Editor, short articles of interest, and information for the calendar and other sections are invited. Please send submissions to Editor sarah.garriott@aolti.com. Submissions become the property of *NOTIS NEWS* and are subject to editing unless otherwise agreed in advance. Opinions expressed are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of the Editor, the Society, or its Board.

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NOTIS Membership Fees  
Individual & Institutional \$35.00 a year  
Corporate \$50.00 a year  
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# NOTIS Notes

## Welcome to New Members

Reed Aubin	Spanish > English
	French > English
Gilles Carjuzaa	French <> English
	Spanish > English
Ashley Fullenwider	Russian > English
Andrea Florissi	Italian <> English
	German > English
Elaine Harvey	Spanish <> English
Esther Hung	English > Chinese/Mandarin
Paul Listen	German > English
Ferdi Nadir	French <> English
	Turkish <> English
Julia Peterson	Russian <> English
Leticia Ropers	German > English
	Spanish > English
Rebecca Segura	Spanish <> English
Yuan Wang	Mandarin <> English
	Mandarin <> Cantonese
	English > Cantonese

## Rejoins

Tanika Barsegian	Russian <> English
Timothy Gregory	Arabic > English
Marlene Heinemann	German <> English
	Spanish > English
M. Antonia Iglesias	English <> Spanish
Steven Maxon	Spanish > English
Pablo Sepulveda	Spanish <> English
Jeremy Simer	Spanish <> English

## Corporate

Interpreters and Translators, Inc.

## International Translators Day event, September 18, 2004

By Jessica Cohen

In honor of International Translators Day, NOTIS, SOMI and WITS members were presented with a talk by veteran diplomatic interpreter Harry Obst, in which he introduced us to the main components of this line of work, and recounted anecdotes from his personal history in the field. At the beginning of his talk, Mr. Obst established that the majority of attendees were engaged in other forms of interpreting (medical, court, community, and so forth) or worked as translators. He therefore provided a brief overview of the type of work involved in diplomatic interpreting and how it differs from other interpreting work.

Mr. Obst outlined his professional history in the T&I industry, beginning with his training as a professional translator at the University of Mainz, up to his most recent position as founder and director of the Inlingua School of Interpretation in Virginia, a post from which he has recently retired. Most of his interpreting work was done as a contractor for the Office of Language Services at the US Department of State, which he also directed for many years. Obst recounted the fascinating story of how this office was established in 1790 by Thomas Jefferson, who had become keenly aware of the importance of foreign language interpreters during his time in Paris.

The most difficult type of diplomatic interpreting, in Mr. Obst's view, is what is known as the "one on one," or a meeting between two Heads of State, each with an interpreter in tow. In many cases, the interpreters also act as note-takers, making their job that much more difficult. (As all interpreters know, interpreting notes are a far cry from notes that can adequately serve as meeting minutes). In this type of work, as is generally the rule when interpreting for the Department of State, interpreters work *into* their second language, which contradicts the generally accepted wisdom among interpreters and their employers. The primary reason for this, Mr. Obst explained, is that high-quality interpreting depends on the interpreter's thorough and immediate analysis of the source message—less on his or her ability to choose the correct target words. Clearly, such an intuitive and detailed grasp of material is far more attainable in one's native language than in an acquired language. Although organizations that employ vast numbers of interpreters, such as the United Nations and the European Union, officially subscribe to the "into native language" approach to interpreting, Mr. Obst has been told

by senior officials in the interpreting departments of these organizations, that in fact they now acknowledge that the State Department method makes for better interpreting, but it is too late to make such drastic policy changes within these organizations.

High on the list of Mr. Obst's favorite type of diplomatic interpreting, are State funerals. In these gatherings, he reports, there is rarely much official work to be done, and they afford an opportunity to socialize with fellow interpreters from around the world. Among the many anecdotes Mr. Obst recounted about various American presidents and other Heads of State he has worked with, a definite crowd-pleaser was a claim reportedly made by President Lyndon Johnson about interpreters. When asked what he would do if his entire cabinet were to strike, President Johnson replied that, without a doubt, he would replace all his ministers with interpreters until a permanent solution could be found, as he

*"...high-quality interpreting depends on the interpreter's thorough and immediate analysis of the source message—less on his or her ability to choose the correct target words."*

felt that interpreters had the breadth of knowledge and understanding of State affairs that the job requires. During one of his interpreting jobs, Mr. Obst was asked by President Johnson for his advice on an official matter during a diplomatic "one on one" meeting in Germany. Fortunately, Obst was up

to the task, and LBJ was able to save face with his German counterpart.

From among the many necessary skills for a good diplomatic interpreter, Mr. Obst attributes great importance to having extensive general knowledge in a variety of fields. He also emphasized the importance of self-confidence and, as he described it, "some degree of fearlessness." A diplomatic interpreter will often find him or herself in potentially embarrassing or daunting positions, huge exposure to press and large audiences, being surrounded by powerful and respectable figures, and in some cases, being treated as the lowest rung on the ladder. Interpreters are often scapegoated in sticky situations, or blamed for a mistake that was in fact made by the "client," and they must be able to stoically take the blame and move on. Diplomatic interpreters often work for very long hours with virtually no time to eat or rest, and they must be able to maintain the high level of energy that is essential for their work. They are also often faced with officials and handlers who do not

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## Our World is Two-dimensional and we Think Vertically!

By Chaouky Kaboul

Pacific Northwest Translators and Interpreters celebrated St. Jerome's Day early this year. The Seattle event took place on Saturday, September 18th at the Seattle



Harry Obst

Asian Art Museum (Volunteer Park). The event, capably organized by a group of wonderful volunteers under the leadership of Deya Jorda Nolan, Emma Garkavi and Michelle Privat Obermeyer, was

sponsored by Washington State Court Interpreters and Translators Society (WITS), the Society of Medical Interpreters (SOMI), and the Northwest Translators & Interpreters Society (NOTIS).

Our guest was Harry Obst, the ex-director of the State Department's Office of Language Services. His talk during lunch was about the Diplomatic Interpreting field as experienced during his career of more than three decades. After lunch, we were treated to another talk about consecutive interpretation and the methodology used by Mr. Obst to train consecutive interpreters to become more effective and more faithful to the meaning rather than to the words.

Mr. Obst came to the United States from Germany as an immigrant after completing a translator program at the University of Mainz. After a few years in private industry, he joined the Department of State in Washington D.C. as a diplomatic interpreter. He interpreted for seven American presidents, and also provided escort interpreting and consecutive and simultaneous interpretation at several major summits and conferences.

In his trip down memory lane regarding his career of almost 30 years, he highlighted the three major attributes of successful diplomatic interpreters:

- Stamina: you are expected to be in top performance shape on short notice regardless of jet lag and limited sleep.
- Knowledge: the general body of knowledge acquired by diplomatic interpreters comes in to the rescue during most assignments.
- Fearlessness: you need some chutzpah to interpret for world leaders in high profile situations.

*“Interpreting has little to do with the actual words of the speakers [...]. Linguistic skills are important of course, but interpreting is really “detective work” in search of intended meaning behind a group of sentence pieces...”*

The audience of more than 90 translators and interpreters savored the great sense of humor with which Mr. Obst shared stories about his successes and defeats. These stories included anecdotes ranging from a one-on-one meeting between Lyndon B. Johnson and the German Chancellor in 1976, to having an interpreter embedded



with the secret service. Harry's back-up interpreter saved the day for President Bush (Senior) during an event in Hungary when the US embassy insisted on providing one

of their own interpreters who, for one reason or another, was paralyzed with fear as the President began to speak.



Luckily, our official White House interpreter was just feet away pretending to be a secret service agent. And yes, Mr. Obst was there when President Ford tripped on the Air Force One staircase in Salzburg, Austria. As the President tumbled down the stairs in full view of press and the world, he, the official White House interpreter for the President, missed the whole thing because of a poor seating arrangement that positioned him so far away he couldn't see and could hardly hear to do his job. Hey, some officials still don't know that the interpreters need to hear and SEE the speaker in order to do their job! Can you imagine the look on Harry Obst's face when he read

*What does he mean by “bipolar?” Up to 75% of what we hear as interpreters is composed of language telling us “Who or What did what to whom.”*

the paper the following morning and saw the official photo of the President's fall along with Harry's mistaken interpretation of what the President said?

After a short break, Mr. Obst presented a mini-workshop on consecutive interpreting skills. “Interpreting has little to do with the actual words of the speakers,” Mr. Obst told the group. Linguistic skills are important of course,

but interpreting is really “detective work” in search of intended meaning behind a group of sentence pieces (package of words) used by a speaker addressing an audience who does not speak the same language. You will find the most appropriate words in your intended language (target) once you have a good handle on the meaning. As a “detective,” the interpreter ought to be reading clues including the speaker's expressions and body language in order to communicate the message effectively. In addition to improving one's strategic listening skills, the most important advice he gives his trainees is to consider that we live in a two-dimensional world where everything is “bipolar.”

*“Mr. Obst encouraged us to “de-emphasize” our obsession with terminology. Of course terminology is important [...]. Consider however, that we (on average) only use less than 5% of the words available in the English language.”*

What does he mean by “bipolar?” Up to 75% of what we hear as interpreters is composed of language telling us “Who or What did what to whom.” The other 25% is descriptive information—albeit important. Once we focus on the WWW (Who or What did What to Whom), we can add the WHW (When, Where, How and Why) and, voila! We have 100% of our message to faithfully render to our audience.

In his three-week intensive “omni-language” interpreter training course, Mr. Obst focuses on short term memory skills, strategic listening skills (ever wonder why they teach us to read and write in school but not listening skills?), and effective note taking skills.

Too much energy and time is spent on writing words down. Interpreters do not have that much time to expend and ought to focus their mental energy on rendering the message efficiently. This is where vertical thinking and note taking plays an important role. Let's start with the note pad. The most appropriate interpreting note pad is

one that is skinny (wire bound 4" X 8" reporter's notepad—TOP 8030) so we are forced to jot down our symbols with no or minimal words vertically:

S  
          V  
                  O  
                          O

Q:

A:

(Speaker)A

(Speaker)B

(Speaker)C

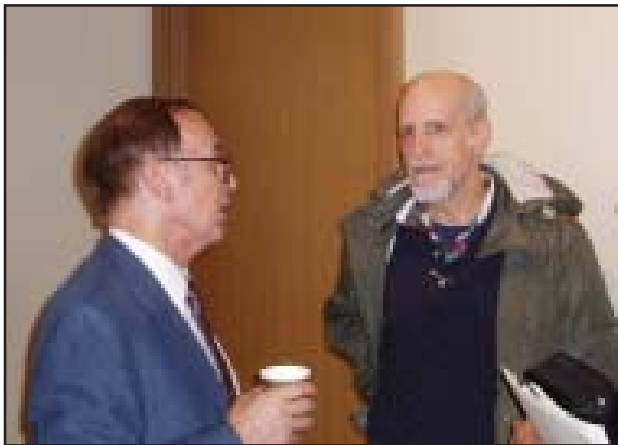
?

!

!!

Etc.

Draw an imaginary line and leave a margin to the left. You will use this margin for the “switches in speaker” and “signals.” Always observe the basic rule of dropping down a line to denote the Subject, Verb, Object/s so there is not room for mix-up between verb and noun words. In the



end, these symbols are signals to your short-term memory so you are able to faithfully render the message you heard two or three sentences ago.

Ideally, you'd use ideograms to symbolize the message you are about to “speak.” Economize on the use of words and opt for clever abbreviations and codes that you would develop for yourself and would, of course, practice and study regularly.

Mr. Obst encouraged us to “de-emphasize” our obsession with terminology. Of course terminology is important and interpreters who specialize in certain fields ought to regularly educate themselves as new words are born! Consider however, that we (on average) only use



less than 5% of the words available in the English language. For example, someone somewhere is going to use words that you have not ever heard before. There are always creative ways to communicate / interpret the meaning clearly and the listening experts will almost always know what you are trying to “transfer” from the source language.

You are a faithful echo for the source message so do not get caught up in words and verbatim rendition (unless you are in a courtroom where the judge insists on it). Instead, listen properly to the source message, take useful notes, and always do your short-term memory training exercises.

It was very fitting to have Harry Obst share his thoughts, expertise and stories from his professional life with us on International Translators Day. There couldn't be a better gift to celebrate the day. We were all reminded

of our professional challenges and rewards no matter what the venue of our work is. Judging from the smiles and the beaming faces of my colleagues on that day, I am



comforted to know that we are in a profession that makes our hearts sing.

From among the many necessary skills for a good diplomatic interpreter, Mr. Obst attributes great importance to having extensive general knowledge in a variety of fields. He also emphasized the importance of self-confidence and, as he described it, “some degree of fearlessness.” A diplomatic interpreter will often find himself or herself in potentially embarrassing or daunting positions, huge exposure to press and large audiences, being surrounded by powerful and respectable figures, and in some cases, being treated as the lowest rung on the ladder. Inter-

preters are often the scape goat in sticky situations, or blamed for a mistake that was in fact made by the “client,” and they must be able to stoically take the blame and move on. Diplomatic interpreters often work very long hours with virtually no time to eat or rest, and they must be able to maintain the high level of energy that is essential for their work. They are also often faced with officials and handlers who do not understand what an interpreter needs in order to do a good job, and consequently must be able to improvise and make the best of poor working conditions.

If these prerequisites haven’t scared you off, Mr. Obst recommends that anyone interested in entering the field of diplomatic interpreting apply to take the escort interpreting test offered by the Department of State. Interpreters who pass the test and begin working as escort interpreters, are often closely watched by the powers-that-be at the Office of Language Services, and promising interpreters will be gradually bumped up the rungs leading to diplomatic interpreting jobs. Judging by Mr. Obst’s enthusiasm about his work and the stories he recounted, the field of diplomatic interpreting could provide the right candidate with a wonderful opportunity to travel the world, meet interesting people, and even be privy to some of the historical moments that occur among political figures in suites behind closed doors.

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## **The Business of Translation and Interpreting Seminar**

### **An ATA Professional Development Seminar**

The ATA-sponsored seminar held at the Crowne Plaza Hotel in Seattle on August 28, 2004 was a resounding success with over one hundred participants pre-registered for the event. The four very informative sessions focused on contracts for the freelancer, how a typical translation company operates, marketing, and finally how to run your T&I Business out of your home. The speakers proved to be lively

and dynamic and they all did an outstanding job of lecturing the participants while sharing insider tips and tricks, and entertaining their audience with many behind-the-scene stories culled from their many years of navigating our industry. For those of us who did not get a chance to travel to Toronto for the annual ATA conference, this seminar was an opportunity not to be missed!

## JLD Activities at 2004 ATA Conference

*By Ken Wagner*

The Japanese Language Division mustered a full-slate of 12 presentations, filling all nine of its ninety-minute slots. In previous years, the JLD had not been able to fill all nine slots.

The featured presentation was by Ted Goossen, a Japanese literature professor at York University in the Toronto area, translator of modern Japanese literature, and jury member for one of the most prestigious prizes for modern Japanese literature presentation. Prof. Goossen spoke on “subjectivity” in modern Japanese literature and delighted the audience with tales of meeting famous Japanese authors as part of his translation activities. The remaining presentations were given by JLD members on translation and interpretation techniques.

A dedicated membership and hard-working conference organizing committee accounted for the success of this year’s conference presentations. In the same fashion, the JLD’s 2005 conference organizing committee is already working on plans for next year’s conference in Seattle.

The JLD also obtained ATA approval to provide funding for the Sixteenth International Japanese-English Translation Conference (IJET-16), a conference for Japanese-English translators and interpreters that is fully independent of the ATA, but has served as a de facto division conference for the JLD for 15 years.

Although the ATA Board initially rejected the JLD’s request to fund IJET-16, a lobbying campaign directed by NOTIS member and Past ATA President Ann Macfarlane, a reworked written appeal to the Board (the third appeal or

motion presented to the ATA Board), and that together with a presentation at the Board meeting by three supporters of the motion led to the eventual approval. The IJET-16 organizing committee is using the \$3,000 JLD grant to fund a keynote speaker and “outside experts,” non-translators who can present advanced training in translation specialty areas.

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## Text to Speech Summary (A Report From the ATA 2004 Conference)

*By Ken Wagner*

It is possible to check 3,000 to 4,000 words of rough translation per hour, using the text-to-speech (TTS) feature available on both PCs and MACs, Ben Tompkins, a Japanese-English biomedical translator from Kansas City, MO, has found. TTS allows the translator to keep his eyes focused on the translated text as the computer reads the source text. This eliminates the switching back and forth between two texts that can be so time-consuming, confusing, and hard on the eyes when checking a translation. Ben uses TTS to check rough drafts, not for the final proofread. The technique does involve some learning, however. It is necessary to accustom oneself to the machine-generated voices available and learn to account for the fact that the TTS feature does not read punctuation or mathematical symbols (i.e.,  $5 + 4 = 9$  would be read as “five, four, nine”). In Japanese, correct—or even comprehensible—reading of proper nouns is a problem. Ben’s presentation featured a lecture on the technique followed by a hands-on workshop.

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understand what an interpreter needs to do a good job, and consequently must be able to improvise and make the best of poor working conditions.

If these prerequisites haven’t scared you off, Mr. Obst recommends that anyone interested in entering the field of diplomatic interpreting apply to take the escort interpreting test offered by the Department of State. Interpreters who pass the test and begin working as escort interpreters, are often closely watched by the powers-that-be at

the Office of Language Services, and promising interpreters will be gradually bumped up the rungs leading to diplomatic interpreting jobs. Judging by Mr. Obst’s enthusiasm about his work and the stories he recounted, the field of diplomatic interpreting could provide the right candidate with a wonderful opportunity to travel the world, meet interesting people, and even be privy to some of the historical moments that occur among men in suits behind closed doors.



©©© *Continued from page 1*

fortunately the person in charge of all the database programming and publishing work had some serious health issues which set the entire work way behind schedule. There was also a financial concern that had to be taken into account. On an average, varying from year to year, the Print Directory would cost about \$4,000 or about a third of the entire organizational budget.

Given the fact that, according to the recent Membership Satisfaction Survey, our members would very much like to see more educational programs, workshops and seminars, the Board decided to make it a priority in terms of expense. Additionally, as you all know, printed matter these days becomes outdated almost the moment it comes off the press and our NOTIS on-line directory has been receiving more traffic than ever before. Therefore, we are sending a letter redirecting former recipients of the Print Directory to our powerful, user-friendly, on-line version. Furthermore, we will aggressively advertise NOTIS and its on-line directory by increasing our visibility on Internet search engines and sending regular reminders of our on-line resources to an expanding list of potential users of translation and interpretation services. The Board feels this will be a more dynamic and cost-effective way to advertise NOTIS membership and member services.

Speaking of the Membership Satisfaction Survey, I should say that we are taking our members' insights, concerns and suggestions very seriously. So far this issue has been discussed at three successive Board meetings since August. Having processed the members' responses, the Board has identified a list of the top priorities including suggestions for:

- increasing the volume of seminars and workshops
- expanding the usefulness of the Newsletter
- providing more opportunities for networking and welcoming new members
- making NOTIS' geographical presence more tangible

The Board and the Program Committee are currently working on identifying the specific programs and topics to offer our members in 2005. Needless to say, the organization of several programs a year cannot possibly be accomplished by the Program Committee alone, which consists of two Directors, Michelle Privat Obermeyer and Deya Jorda Nolan, without a broader participation of the membership. For our organization to grow, and develop suc-

cessfully we need more volunteers!!! Please get involved and contact Michelle and Deya respectively at: mpober@microsoft.com ; Deya24@covad.net

Another area about which the NOTIS Board is concerned is increasing our membership. For this purpose we have undertaken a Membership Drive. The Membership Drive Committee headed by the Office Manager and Membership Coordinator Christina Zubelli, has identified a list of about 150 new addresses for potential members (Individual, Corporate and Institutional) throughout the five states that constitute the NOTIS membership: Alaska, Idaho, Montana, Oregon, and Washington. Most of these new addresses are for corporate members, and a fair amount are for institutional members meaning mostly colleges and universities. The President has created three invitation letters adapted for our three membership categories. Packets including an appropriate invitation letter, the new NOTIS Brochure, and an application form will be mailed to the potential members very shortly.

I would like to remind you that only 12 months, almost up to the day, are left before the ATA Conference comes to Seattle, Westin Hotel, November 9-12, 2005. NOTIS, as an ATA Chapter and one of the hosting organizations, has begun preparations for it. Director Caitilin Walsh, the head of the Steering Committee, presented a detailed and impressive plan at the Board meeting on September 15, 2004. Part of the plan promoting NOTIS, included the activities that already took place at the Business of Translation and Interpreting Seminar, August 28, 2004, Seattle, and at the 45<sup>th</sup> ATA Conference in Toronto, October 13-16, 2004. In Toronto NOTIS had a table near the registration desk which attracted a lot of attention. Lots of promotional materials were available such as maps of Seattle and 2005 license plate stickers, and published materials from NOTIS, as well as our sister organizations, WITS and SOMI. All of which made a great impression. The 2005 ATA Conference addendum has been created for the NOTIS website. The Steering Committee is continuing its work, and would appreciate any ideas, suggestions, help from the members. You can reach Caitilin at: cwals@nwlink.com

In conclusion, I want to thank the Board Directors for their commitment, creativity, and enormous work for the benefit of NOTIS, and extend appreciation to all the volunteers who contribute their time and effort to our organization.

# Calendar

Date	Event	Details	Time & Place
December 4, 2004	NOTIS/ WITS Joint Holiday Potluck	<a href="http://www.notisnet.org">www.notisnet.org</a>	UW Waterfront Activities Center, Seattle
December 15, 2004 6:30 p.m.	NOTIS Board Meeting	<a href="http://www.notisnet.org">www.notisnet.org</a>	TBD
April 29-May 1, 2005	ATA Professional Development Seminar: Financial Translation	<a href="http://www.atanet.org">www.atanet.org</a>	Jersey City, New Jersey
May 13-15, 2005	NAJIT 26 <sup>th</sup> Annual Conference	<a href="http://www.najit.org">www.najit.org</a>	Washington D.C.

**Next Issue:**

- FIRST Edition of the JOINT WITS / NOTIS Newsletter!
- Report of the NOTIS Annual Meeting.

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