Introduction for keynote speaker Dr. Andrew J. Viterbi at the thirtieth anniversary celebration of USC's Communication Sciences Institute, November 29, 2012

By Solomon W. Golomb

It’s a rare pleasure to be able to introduce, as our keynote speaker, a friend of mine for more than fifty-five years.

Andrew J. Viterbi was born in Italy, came to the U.S. as a small child with his parents; grew up in Boston, where he attended the Boston Latin School, and then M.I.T., where he was awarded a bachelor’s and a master’s degree in Communications Engineering in 1957.

Then, in June 1957, he came to work at the Jet Propulsion Laboratory, JPL, in time to participate in the successful launch of Explorer I, the U.S.’s first earth satellite. We were both in Section 8, headed by Eberhardt Rechtin, which became Section 331, headed by Walter Victor, part of the new Division 33, Telecommunications, headed by Rechtin. By that time, Andy headed the Communications Research Group, and I was Deputy Section Chief to Victor.

While working at JPL, Andy was also working on his Ph.D. degree here at U.S.C., which he was awarded in 1962. He then took a faculty position across town at a school that will play for the PAC-12 Championship tomorrow evening. While there, Andy invented the Viterbi Algorithm, originally for decoding convolution codes, and subsequently for everything else.

While at UCLA, Andy also cofounded a company called Linkabit, with Irwin Jacobs and Leonard Kleinrock. Then, in 1973, Andy moved to U.C. San Diego; and in San Diego he and Jacobs built Linkabit into a successful communications company, which they then sold, in the mid-1980s, to M/A-COM. Then, in 1985, Andy and Irwin cofounded Qualcomm, which set a record for the shortest time interval between its I.P.O. and joining the ranks of the “S. and P. 500.” As chief technologist, Andy pushed the perfection, promotion, and ultimate adoption of CDMA as the preferred standard for 3G wireless telephony. Andy served as Vice Chairman of Qualcomm until 2000.

Andy is currently President of the Viterbi Group LLC, and has a number of academic titles. In 2004, he became the first “Presidential Professor” in USC History, here in our department of EE/Systems. His philanthropy has benefitted several academic institutions, not least USC, where, for example, I now hold the Viterbi Chair in the Viterbi School. Andy also serves on the USC Board of Trustees.

Andy’s memberships include both the NAE and the NAS. A complete listing of Andy’s honors, awards, and nine Honorary Doctoral Degrees would leave no time for his talk –so I’ll only mention two of the most important: The National Medal of Science, presented in person by the President of the United States, and the highest award bestowed by the IEEE, its 2010 Medal of Honor.

Here’s Andy!!!