

[Editor's Note: The following talk was presented in Beijing on September 14, 2009 as part of the first national Netizens celebration day sponsored by the Internet Society of China.\*]

## **First Netizen Celebration Day Held in Beijing, China**

Honoring the Netizen

Ronda Hauben

I would like to thank the Internet Society of China for inviting me to offer brief remarks today. I want also to congratulate the honored guests for their role in helping to make possible the development of the Internet and the emergence of the Netizens.

It is wonderful that China is holding this netizen day, the first ever to be held anywhere in the world. Often there have been events celebrating the origin and development of the Internet but only rarely has there been recognition offered for the netizen, for those online users who have taken on to contribute to the development and spread of the Net and to making possible the better world that more communication among people will make possible.

The concept of netizen comes from the research and writing of Michael Hauben while he was a college student in the early 1990s. Michael was interested not only in how the Internet would develop and spread, but also in the impact it would have on society. In 1992 he sent out a set of questions across the computer networks asking users about their experiences online. He was surprised to find that not only were many of those who responded to his questions interested in what the Net made possible for them, but also they were interested in spreading the Net and in exploring how it would make a better world possible. Network users with this social perspective, or this public interest focus Michael called Netizens. Thus the Netizen was not all users, but users with a public purpose.

Another aspect is that the Net is international, so that netizenship isn't a geographically limited concept. To be a netizen is to be not only a citizen of one country but also a citizen of the net. These users are citizens who were empowered by the Net, or netizens. Based on his research, Michael wrote the article "The Net and Netizens: The Impact the Net has on People's Lives". The article and the concept of the Netizen spread around the world via the Internet.

Michael and I included his influential article as part of a book titled "Netizens" which we put online on January 12, 1994. Today's celebration of Netizen Day in China is for me also a fitting celebration of the 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary of putting the first edition of the book "Netizens" online.

In China there are many important examples of netizen activity, including for example, the many posts that netizens make discussing important social issues, and the creation of online forums like the anti-cnn web site.

Around the world the traditional news media is in crisis, especially in the US and Europe. Online developments like the anti-cnn web forum have helped to clarify some of the problem with the traditional news media in the West and how they report the news. Around the world online news sites are developing which are attempting to give a more accurate presentation of the News. I have been reporting for two such news sites, one in South Korea and one in Germany. I have found they help make it possible to explore how to do a more accurate and interesting presentation of the news. Recently several of my articles were awarded the silver award for online and print journalism for reporting about issues at the United Nations.

To me this was not only an honor for these articles, but even more important, an honor for efforts to develop what I call “netizen journalism” a form of journalism that endeavors to determine how to report the news from a social rather than political or commercial perspective.

Though today is the first national netizen day, I have recently seen on the Internet a call for a World Netizen Day. So the importance of establishing a netizen day begun by the Internet Society of China is a proud beginning what I hope will become a new tradition, recognizing the importance of the contributions made by Netizens to the continuing spread and development of the Internet.

Congratulations not only to those who have been honored here today, but to all netizens in China and to netizens around the world. May the tradition of the netizen, along with the development of the Internet, grow and flourish.