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THE EUROPEAN INVENTOR AWARD: A SAIL AS A SYMBOL OF INNOVATION AND PROGRESS

On June 7, 2018 the EPO (EPO) will confer the European Inventor Award in Paris, Saint-Germain-en-Laye, France. The EPO launched the European Inventor Award in 2006, and since then some of the world's most brilliant inventors and leading names in political, scientific and economic circles have met every year in a different European city to raise awareness and to encourage researchers and inventors to protect their ideas through patenting, and also to encourage research and innovation in the fields of science, technology, medicine, and industry.

The European Inventor Award winners receive no prize money but are honored for their innovation by being awarded the famous sail-shaped trophy. The EPO commissioned the trophy from German designer Miriam Irle, who chose a sail because it encapsulates the idea of exploration, change, and humanity's spirit of innovation. The sail is also one of the oldest propulsion systems known to humanity - a fabric surface with a shape that uses the force of the wind to generate propulsion and which represents a technological idea that, although simple, enabled humanity to progress. To remain faithful to the spirit of innovation, every year the trophy changes: while the sail remains the award's motif, it is made from a different material or with a different process depending on the artisan traditions and resources of the country hosting the award ceremony.

The European Inventor Award is now in its thirteenth year, and in that time it has honored inventions that have changed the lives of every one of us. The most prestigious category is the Lifetime Achievement, the career award given to an inventor whose scientific and innovative contribution has brought major changes in the respective technological sector and in society generally.

This year's finalists for the Lifetime Achievement award are:

- Prof. Ursula Keller of AT&T Bell Laboratories, who discovered how to turn continuous laser light into ultra-fast laser pulses, leading to exceptional inventions in the field of semiconductors, surgical precision instruments, etc.
- Jaques Lewiner, of Finsecur SA, whose inventions ranges from electronics to medical sensors to security to telecommunications. Among other inventions, in 2000 he launched his fire-detection specialist company to market his innovative smoke detector design, which has since become a EUR 34-million-per-year venture.
- Henrik Stiesdal, of Siemens Wind Power and Stiesdal A/S, who in 1979 created a three-blade, upwind-rotor wind turbine that is now known as the "Danish Concept", and has been devising significant developments in the field of turbines, and of green technology and renewable energy in the broader sense, ever since.

The European Inventor Award signal's the EPO's awareness of the importance of rewarding and offering instruments to protect technological innovations through intellectual property rights, as also shown by the many other recent initiatives taken by the EPO to streamline and shorten its patent grant procedure and enhance the specialization of its Examiners, in the interest of all users of the system.