

Professor Israel Gelfand, one of the most original and broadest mathematicians of our time, passed away on October 5, 2009. His intuition was legendary; his works created a number of major areas of mathematics, and had strong impact in many other areas. His influence on students, collaborators, colleagues, and participants in his Moscow seminar (which was the center of Moscow mathematical life for many years), as well as on those who knew him only through his published works, has been profound.

After coming to Rutgers in 1990, Gelfand was extremely active in our department and in the wider mathematical community. He communicated with almost every faculty member of our department, and continued his famous seminar at Rutgers. He published three books while at Rutgers (Discriminants, Resultants and multidimensional Determinants with Kapranov and Zelevinsky in 1994, Selected Topics in Integral Geometry with Gindikin and Graev in 2000 (Russian) and 2003 (English translation), and Coxeter Matroids with Borovik and White in 2003) as well as more than 50 papers in mathematics. He also pursued major research programs on noncommutative mathematics (with Retakh and Wilson) and on the structure of proteins (with Kister). It was not uncommon to find him in his office holding simultaneous conversations with collaborators on three different research projects.

While at Rutgers, he received a MacArthur Award in 1994, the Russian State Prize (together with Simon Gindikin and Mark Graev) in 1997, and the Leroy P. Steel Prize for Lifetime Achievement from the American Mathematical Society in 2005. His previous honors, while too numerous to list in full, include the Wolf Prize (1978) and the Kyoto Prize (1989).

The title of a conference (held in Cambridge, Massachusetts) in honor of his 90th birthday was “The Unity of Mathematics”. This accurately reflected both Professor Gelfand’s philosophy that all mathematics is related and also his activities and accomplishments throughout his career.