

Math Department Seeks to Honor Wolfson

Back in the 1950s, when the Rutgers mathematics department was small and undistinguished, a young researcher named Kenneth Graham Wolfson saw potential. "He had a long-range vision for the department," recalls his colleague and friend Terry Butler. "He was going to make this into a top-notch research department. Of course, had he said this, people would have rolled their eyes." In doing so, they would have underestimated Wolfson.

Though he loved research, the noted algebraist and expert in ring theory took on the administrative duties of department chair in 1961. In 1975, when he assumed deanship of the Graduate School, he left as a legacy a mathematics department that ranked among the top 20 in the country. Wolfson eventually returned to teaching and research after a decade at the Graduate School. Upon his retirement from the university in 1991 after 39 years of service, he was named a distinguished professor emeritus.

Indebted to this dynamic leader, who died on October 7, 2000, at the age of 75, the mathematics department wants to renovate and name the seventh-floor lounge of the Hill Center for the Mathematical Sciences in his honor. The lounge adjoins the department's colloquium room and is the

gathering place for faculty and students. In reconfiguring the space, which is estimated to cost \$75,000, the department intends to reserve one section for graduate students.

"Ken took great pride in the Hill Center building as a symbol of the stature he helped the mathematics department attain," says current department chair Rick Falk. "It seems appropriate to honor him by restoring the lounge so that it is once again a source of pride to the department and renaming it the Wolfson lounge."

During his tenure, Wolfson not only raised the funds needed to build the seven-story Hill Center, but he also brought in two highly competitive Center of Excellence Grants from the National Science Foundation. These grants helped attract outstanding faculty in pure and applied mathematics, according to Falk.

Beyond his extraordinary fund-raising abilities, Wolfson possessed two characteristics—his commitment to a democratic operation and his fairness—that contributed to his success as a leader, according to Butler. "Normally, you would think a person with an aggressive vision would be dictatorial and authoritative," he says. "But Ken believed in discussing issues, voting on them, and having decisions reviewed by everyone. We would come to

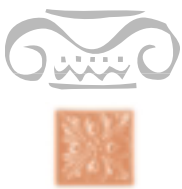
a meeting with our minds made up on a substantial matter and one person could persuade us that we weren't right. It was very democratic."

The most dramatic evidence of Wolfson's fairness, Butler says, was his equal treatment of women at a time when they were treated like second-class citizens at other institutions. In fact, a recent national study of women in mathematics praised Wolfson for making Rutgers "a model of progressive hiring practices and gender equity." Consequently, Butler notes, those outstanding female researchers helped mold the department into one of the most reputable today in terms of research.

Those who wish to support this effort to honor Wolfson should contact JoAnn Kulikowski, associate director of development, at 732/932-8753. ■



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