

Early Meritorious Service Winners

A few months ago, I was honored to receive the Mathematical Association of America's Certificate of Meritorious Service. I am thankful for those in the section who nominated me and for the many years that I have been able to support the efforts and work of the Indiana Section of the MAA, as well as the Association itself. However, my inner historian, general curiosity, and the need to write this story called me to looking into this award in detail.

Established in 1983 by the MAA, the Certificate of Meritorious Service recognizes outstanding "service at the national level or for service to a Section of the Association." The individual sections of the MAA are responsible for nominating candidates on a rotating basis and are "entitled and encouraged to nominate one person for the award every five years." [1] Previous winners of the Yueh-Gin Gung and Dr. Charles Y. Hu Award for Distinguished Service to Mathematics are not eligible for the Certificate. Posthumous awards of the Certificate are possible.

The MAA provides guidelines for the section nomination: each section must have "a committee of at least three members to select a single candidate for the award. The nominating committee should prepare a citation indicating the reasons for the selection of the nominee. The nominating committee should send electronically the final recommendation with the citation to the Secretary's office: secretary@maa.org." [1] However, the MAA's Board of Directors make the final approval of the nominations.

The Certificate is distinct from the Indiana Section Distinguished Service Award, created in 1993. The latter award honors "a member of the Section by acknowledging his or her extraordinary contributions to the Section and outstanding efforts consistent with the stated purposes of the Mathematical Association of America and the Section, namely, assisting in promoting the interests of, and improving education in, the mathematical sciences in America, especially at the collegiate level." [2] Given annually, the Distinguished Service Award has historically focused on contributions made at the section level.

As you might suspect, I took time to find out who the prior seven winners from Indiana were. They are a very impressive group of people (men, a fact that I hope will change in the future), and five of them have citations available on the section website. [3] The rest of this essay will tell you more about our first two winners, Gerhard N. "Gus" Wollan and Rodney T. Hood.

Gus Wollan, the first Certificate winner from Indiana in 1984, was vice-chair of the section in 1957-58 and chair the following year. He was the section governor from 1966-1969. For many years (1965-1985), Gus was the editor of the *Indiana School Mathematics Journal*, a publication of the section that posed problems and solutions in school mathematics. (Interestingly, I cannot find any record of this journal, so that will be a story for another day.) Gus was also editor of *Mathematics Magazine* from 1970-1975 and, according to his obituary, revived the magazine for the MAA from a "troubled" state of being. (Again, no story yet about what the trouble was!)

Gus grew up in Minnesota and graduated from Luther College (Decatur IA), where he was later inducted into its Football Hall of Fame. He had a great love of teaching and taught high school for a number of years before earning his M.S. at the University of Iowa. He then taught at multiple colleges while earning his Ph.D. from the University of Georgia. When he first arrived in Indiana, he taught at Purdue University's Fort Wayne campus before eventually transferring to the Lafayette campus. After a long career there, Gus retired but continued to teach experimental

geometry at West Lafayette High School. A life-long learner, Gus studied German, Spanish, Italian, and learned to play the cello while in retirement. Gus passed away in 1985. [4]

Rodney T. Hood worked at Franklin College for 32 years, after a short stay at Beloit College. Born in upstate New York, Rodney's undergraduate degree was from Oberlin College, while his M.S. and Ph.D. were from University Wisconsin Madison. He also earned a B.Div. at the Colgate-Rochester Divinity School and had completed work towards a Ph.D. in divinity as well.

Rodney was much loved at Franklin, and his obituary comments that "his bits of verse were highlights of faculty meetings," which Rodney led for much of his career. As implied by his educational background, over time Rodney not only taught all of the mathematics curriculum, but also courses in religion, Greek, Latin, and genealogy.

As a member of the MAA from 1946 until his death, Rodney served as the secretary-treasurer for of the Indiana Section from 1970-1975, then as vice-chair in 1974-75 and chair the following year. He served as the section governor from 1984 to 1987. (Which is when I met this very nice man.) Rodney deeply loved the MAA and was committed to its work; the "Rodney Hood Room" at the Association headquarters in Washington DC recognizes this long-term support.

Author of *Logic and Mathematics*, Rodney loved to travel and talk about mathematics. He attended and presented at multiple International Congress of Mathematicians conferences, was a well-known speaker at high schools in central Indiana, and taught across the country at the NSF's summer institutes for twelve years. [5]

An admirer wrote the following verse when Rodney passed away.

Of values so firmly held
And lived out everyday
Of love of learning so strong
That it often swept away

The routine events of daily life,
While he eagerly explored
The deeper realms of thought that he
So passionately adored. [6]

I believe that this sentiment captures Gus's spirit as well.

The Indiana Section is next eligible to nominate someone for the Certificate of Meritorious Service in 2024.

[1] <https://www.maa.org/programs-and-communities/member-communities/maa-awards/service-awards/meritorious-service> July 25, 2019.

[2] <http://sections.maa.org/indiana/awards.php> July 25, 2019.

[3] <http://sections.maa.org/indiana/MAAawards.php> July 25, 2019.

[4] <http://e-archives.lib.purdue.edu/cdm/compoundobject/collection/ua8/id/8703/rec/1> February 26, 2019

[5] Callon, Dan. Unpublished obituary 2003.

[6] Anonymous, *In Memorial of Rodney Hood*, Unpublished 2003.