



CITATION

FEBRUARY 28, 2004

In keeping with the resolve of the Mathematical Association of America to take substantive action each year to honor extraordinarily successful teaching at all post-secondary levels, the Northern California, Nevada, and Hawaii Section of the Association is pleased to identify

GERALD L. ALEXANDERSON

as the recipient of its MAA Sectional

**AWARD FOR DISTINGUISHED COLLEGE OR
UNIVERSITY TEACHING
OF MATHEMATICS**



FERRY Alexanderson began his teaching career at Santa Clara University so many years ago that the University then had a different name. It was forty-five years ago and for thirty-five of those years he was Department Chair. At Santa Clara, he outlasted six deans and three presidents – confirming his often stated view that faculty should be patient. Deans, provosts and presidents come and go but faculty stay on. When he joined the department there were four other faculty members. When he became chair there were eleven and when he stepped down two years ago, there were twenty-seven.





Known from the start as a popular teacher, he was soon asked to take over the direction of the university's Honors Program, following the long-honored academic tradition of taking successful teachers out of the classroom as soon as possible and moving them into administration. During those early years, though, he was also teaching summer courses for high school teachers in a series of National Science Foundation and General Electric funded institutes for teachers at Santa Clara, Stanford and a Stanford program in Geneva, Switzerland. For many of these he was active in applying for the funding.

Alexanderson claims that everything he learned about teaching he learned from George Pólya and Harold Bacon, who, as it turns out, were good mentors to choose at Stanford. Whatever he learned from them seems to have worked well over the years. Besides the usual comments – “Don't talk so fast.” and “Don't assign so many problems!” recent narrative student evaluations include comments like: “Thanks for restoring my love for math.” “You are awesome – Long live Alexanderson.” “You are cool!” “Alexanderson is the man!”

He has been described as a true renaissance man in the best sense of the term: a man of integrity, of service to others; a man possessing an inquiring mind, an appreciation of the arts and generally a zest for life. His door is always open and he is just as happy to have a conversation about music, ballet, architecture, art, history or literature as he is to talk about mathematics.

His off campus influence on teaching has largely been through textbooks and problem books. He coauthored with A. P. Hillman an abstract algebra text, now in its fifth edition, that continues to be popular. Of his thirteen books – and he's working on a fourteenth – seven are textbooks or problem collections. Most recently he wrote a biography of Pólya. Pedagogical topics can also be found in his roughly 100 papers, articles and reviews.

Within our Section, Jerry was long involved in our visiting lecturer program. He (along with others) took several four day trips to the more remote regions of our Section to lecture to high school students. As Secretary (1990 - 1997) and later President (1997-1999) of the Mathematical Association of America he was able to promote MAA activities that have had an influence on teaching. He encouraged the Project NExT activities and he worked for the establishment of the national teaching awards that later were renamed for Deborah Tepper Haimo and her husband Franklin. As editor of *Mathematics Magazine*, he also had some influence on mathematical exposition – and he now edits the MAA's Spectrum Series of books.

We are proud to present this year's Section Award for Distinguished College or University Teaching of Mathematics to Gerald L. Alexanderson

