

# Know Your Wisconsin Mathematician

Interview with Mark Snavelly, Carthage College, by Benjamin V.C. Collins



## **Where did you grow up?**

I grew up in Massillon, Ohio, a town known for high school football and a great marching band.

## **Was there a time in your life when you discovered that mathematics was what you wanted to do?**

I entered college intending to study computer science, and at that time all computer science majors were required to have a second major. I chose mathematics. At some point in my junior year, I realized that I enjoyed doing mathematics much more than I enjoyed computer science. I still love programming, but usually to solve mathematical problems.

## **Where did you go to school?**

I went college at Grove City College in Grove City, PA, and did my graduate work at Northwestern University.

## **What was the influence of your family on your education?**

I'm a first-generation college graduate, but my parents always put a high value on education and working hard at everything I did. I remember my grandfather telling me that an education is the one thing that nobody could ever take away from me. I think that inspired me to put more effort into my studies than some of my friends did.

## **How did you end up at Carthage College?**

Simply put, Charlotte Chell. When I interviewed at Carthage, the mathematics department had few students, but Charlotte had just been appointed department chair and she wanted to turn things around. Her excitement for building a liberal arts mathematics department and starting an undergraduate research program was infectious, and I knew I wanted to be part of it. Looking back on it, I couldn't have made a better choice.

## **What courses do you like to teach?**

My favorite courses to teach are Real Analysis for the beauty and elegance of the mathematics, and Discrete Structures for the wide variety of topics that we encounter.

## **How have you found that teaching of mathematics has changed over the years?**

The advent of technology has certainly changed how I run my classroom. For instance, in the past I told students to turn off their cell phones; now I have them keep them out so they can participate in interactive class activities. I used to tell students to stay away from internet searches; now I encourage them to see what they can find online and to use the internet as a tool, but to look at the information with a skeptical mind.

## **How were you involved with the MAA over the years?**

I've served the Wisconsin Section as Chair, Secretary-Treasurer, and Governor, and I am currently a member of the MAA's Committee on Graduate Students. I've also participated in every Wisconsin Section meeting since I joined the Carthage faculty in 1990.

**What do you think is the best part of being a mathematician?**

Thinking about mathematics! The world is full of interesting mathematical problems – finding those problems and investigating them makes life fun and invigorating.

**What part of your work do you like the best?**

I love working with students, especially guiding them in writing their senior theses. Classroom teaching is fun, but it is especially satisfying to participate in the process of helping a student find a good mathematical question, answer that question, then write about their problem in a way that communicates their excitement and insights.

**What are you most proud of?**

Carthage invites graduates to return to campus to serve on career panels where they talk about their life after Carthage. I'm so proud of the amazing accomplishments our graduates have made, and humbled to think that our faculty played some role in their success.

**What is your advice to college students and new teachers?**

Never stop learning! We're all students of mathematics, only some of us have been at it a bit longer than others.

Who is a Wisconsin Mathematician that you would like to know? Send suggestions for the next KYWM to Ben Collins, <a href="mailto:collinbe@uwplatt.edu">collinbe@uwplatt.edu</a> .
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