Kenneth Cummins

by Richard Little and David Kullman

Kenneth Cummins was born in 1911 in the village of New Washington, near Bucyrus, Ohio. After graduating Phi Beta Kappa from Ohio Wesleyan University in 1933, he taught mathematics, science, Latin, and music at Sulfur Springs and New Washington High Schools for 24 years. In 1939 he completed a master's degree under Professor Frank Ogg at Bowling Green State University. His master's thesis was *An Elementary Study of the Cubic Surface*.

Cummins joined the mathematics department at Kent State University in 1957, and the following year he completed his Ph.D. at Ohio State. His dissertation, *A Student-Experience-Discovery Approach to the Teaching of Calculus*, was directed by Dr. Harold P. Fawcett. Dr. Cummins received more than thirty National Science Foundation grants to conduct summer and academic year institutes for high school mathematics teachers. Over the years, more than 1,000 teachers took advantage of these professional development opportunities.

In 1970, Cummins teamed up with his former teacher, Harold Fawcett, to write *The Teaching of Mathematics from Counting to Calculus*. This textbook on teaching methods has influenced countless mathematics teachers across Ohio and the nation. Dr. Cummins made more than 100 presentations at meetings of OCTM and NCTM, and he was also a frequent speaker at the MAA Ohio Section and the annual fall mathematics and statistics conferences at Miami University. He served as OCTM President from 1962 to 1964.

Every summer, from 1934 through 1997, Kenneth directed the New Washington Band in Saturday night concerts on the village square. Actually, he directed with his right hand and played trumpet with his left, which must have been a delight to watch and hear. He was also the organizer and director of the New Washington Community Chorus.

Dr. Cummins was still teaching some classes at Kent State University as late as the fall of 1993. In September 1997, he presented a paper at Miami University on "The Construction of the Center of Curvature at a Point on a Parabola." His last formal presentation was at the OCTM/NCTM regional conference in Cleveland in November 1997, where he spoke about "Using the Power of the Student: Capitalizing on Student-Discovery."

Kenneth loved geometry, and his conference presentations always had a geometric flavor, no matter what their title might suggest. He was also famous for including some Latin quotations in every talk that he gave. A true polymath, he loved to learn in several languages and in several disciplines. Shortly before his death in 1998, he was studying advanced geometry in German.

When OCTM initiated the Christofferson-Fawcett Award to honor long-term, dedicated, and inspired service to mathematics education in Ohio, Dr. Cummins was the clear choice to receive the first award. He always enjoyed sharing the excitement of a new idea that he had recently studied or developed. He was gifted in teaching and conveying the thrill of learning to others. Much like the Clerk portrayed in Geoffrey Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, "gladly wolde he lerne and gladly teche."