



Fred Flener Award: Engaging Students in Math Beyond the Classroom

Fred Flener



EXCEPTIONAL
TEACHER
OF MATHEMATICS

In 1964 Fred Flener was in his second year of teaching mathematics at Reavis High School in the south suburbs of Chicago. He felt there was a need for a math contest. Four schools, Reavis, Rich East, Carl Sandburg and Bremen got together and had a contest. It worked so well that all 8 schools in the conference joined the following year. They had 4 contests that year. This continued for several years. Each contest had 3 topics per grade level and an oral contest. The coaches were the question writers. The students loved it! Many of the coaches believed that these contests helped to inspire more students to become math majors after high school. Some of the athletic coaches took issue with the fact that the “mathletes” received a block letter from the school, so the math coaches had to come up with a script letter instead!

After obtaining his doctoral degree, Fred continued to work with the SICA math league. (The Southern-Inter Conference Association now has approximately 33 schools.) By 1976 Fred and John Benson discussed having a math contest in the Chicago area to be held at the University of Chicago. This contest included New Trier, Evanston, Carl Sandburg, Homewood-Flossmoor and Lincoln Way. After seeing the interest in this type of a contest, Richard Rhoads decided to start the ICTM contest at Joliet Jr. College with approximately 15 schools. Fred joined the ICTM contest committee and became a question writer. When NSML was formed in 1977, Fred wrote all or most of the questions for the first few years. He has continued to write one or two levels of questions per contest since the early 80’s—although he doesn’t claim to get them right. He has about a 75% accuracy rate, so a good proofreader is really important!

In addition to his instrumental work with getting math contests started in the state of Illinois, he has taught hundreds of teachers to be an inspiring and challenging teacher of mathematics. His love of a “good problem” is infectious. Over the years he has also probably supervised somewhere around 300 student teachers—many of them are probably coaches for math teams at their schools now.

Chronology

- 1964 Teaching at Reavis - Started math contest with 4 schools
- 1965 SICA begins their math contests
- 1970-72 Fred works doctorate—takes a break from Math contest
- 1972 Starts at NEIU teaching math methods classes and some math courses.
Supervised student teachers
Continued writing questions for SICA
- 1976 Chicago area math contest at U of C
- 1977 ICTM and NSML started—Fred became a question writer
- 2005 Retired from teaching – probably supervised over 300 student teachers