CENTREFOLD

Professor David Vere-Jones

In May of this year David Vere-Jones, Professor of Mathematics at Victoria University of Wellington since 1970, was elected as a Fellow of the Royal Society of New Zealand.

David Vere-Jones is New Zealand's leading resident mathematical statistician. He has made major contributions to the theory of statistics, its applications, and to the teaching of statistics in New Zealand. He is highly regarded internationally and is involved in numerous international activities.

One of his major research areas has been concerned with Point Processes (the statistical theory of sequences of events that occur at discrete points in time or space, such as earthquakes, neuron firings, volcanic eruptions, etc.) A substantial body of the existing theory owes its origins to him, either directly or via his students. Of particular importance and relevance to New Zealand is his pioneering work on the applications of point process theory to seismology. This began with the two papers on the times of occurrence of New Zealand earthquakes in the N.Z. Journal of Geology and Geophysics and is now expanded to include spatial patterns, earthquakes mechanism and the statistical problems associated with earthquake risk estimation and earthquake prediction.

Another area in which he has made substantial contributions is the theory of Markov Processes. This includes both the general theory, and particular examples such as branching processes and queueing theory. His two papers on non-negative matrices, although developed as part of Markov chain theory are relevant to areas of mathematics quite unrelated to statistics.

He has also made substantial contributions to mathematical and statistical education in New Zealand. He is the Subject Convener for Mathematics for the University Entrance Board of the University Grants Committee and a member of the National Consultative Committee on

Mathematics. He was instrumental in setting up Victoria University's Institute of Statistics and Operations Research which promotes and coordinates research, teaching and consulting in Statistics and Operations Research at Victoria University. He continues to be active in the affairs of the Institute and has been its principal chairman since its inception.

Currently he is president of the N.Z. Statistical Association. He is a former president of the N.Z. Mathematical Society which he helped found. He has also been the secretary of the Royal Society's National Committee for Mathematics. He is Chairman of the East Asian and Pacific Regional Committee of the Bernoulli Society (a branch of the International Statistical Institute) and is particularly concerned with improving contact and communications between statisticians in this East Asian/Pacific region.

His international standing is such that he is frequently invited to overseas institutions and conferences. He speaks Russian and other languages thus enabling him to maintain frequent contact with statisticians and seismologists in many countries. He has been an ordinary member of the International Statistical Institute since 1978 (membership is limited and currently stands at about 1000 world-wide) and a Fellow of the Royal Statistical Society since 1969.

David was born in London but came to New Zealand at the age of twelve, completed his secondary education at Hutt Valley High School (was dux in 1953) and was a student at Victoria University of Wellington in the middle fifties. He won a Rhodes scholarship to undertake postgraduate studies in probability theory at Oxford under the supervision of Professor D.G. Kendall. After completing his doctorate he went to Moscow as an exchange Scholar at Moscow University where he made contact with the strong Russian school on probability; contacts which have continued over the years. David returned, as so many ex-Victoria students in mathematics have done, to Wellington in 1962 and took up the post (which he held previously before going to Oxford in 1958) at the Applied Mathematics Division of D.S.I.R. which he held until the mid sixties. During this time he married his wife Mary who was then also working in the Applied Mathematics Division. After short appointments (gained no doubt because of his rapidly developing expertise in mathematical statistics) in distinguished statistical centres such as the Australian National University in Canberra, Michigan State University and Manchester University, the call to Wellington was again answered by his appointment to the chair of mathematics at Victoria University recently vacated by the retirement of his former teacher (Professor J.T. Campbell).

At Victoria he has quickly gained wide-respect for his activities here and is well-known for his work in all areas of the university's activities: research, teaching and administration. The hall-mark of his activity here has been his refusal to allow administrative procedures to dominate his thinking and his ability to never lose sight of the university's main function: research and teaching. His long term and unceasing commitment to research gives witness to that.

David is known for his many areas outside of mathematics. He is a talented actor—some say as good as his brother Peter who is well-known as a professional actor in the New Zealand scene. He is a formidable opponent on the tennis court and was the 1982 singles champion at the local Northland tennis club. He plays interclub tennis right through the year.

The election of David Vere-Jones as a Fellow of the Royal Society of New Zealand will bring expertise to the Fellowship of the Royal Society in an area that it is currently lacking. He will serve the Society with distinction and his colleagues warmly congratulate him on this honour.

G.C. Wake