CENTREFOLD

Wolfgang Vogel

With great sadness we learned that on the morning of October 2, 1996, our friend and colleague, Wolfgang Vogel, Professor of Pure Mathematics at Massey University had died following a short occurrence of cancer. He is survived by his wife Dagmar and son Andreas. Tributes were paid to Wolfgang at a memorial service held in the Russell Room, Wharerata, Massey University on 8 October 1996. From that service I have selected the following extracts from the tributes presented by family, friends and colleagues.

Wolfgang Vogel was born on 8 February 1940 in Bremen, Germany, and in 1958 entered the University of Halle, Germany, to study mathematics and physics. There in 1963 he gained his "Diplom" (MSc) in mathematics, and studied as a "Wissenschaftlicher Aspirant" (Research Scientist) at the universities of Halle, Berlin and Innsbruck (Austria), gaining his PhD in mathematics in 1965, and Habilitation in 1968. He remained on the staff of the University of Halle as "Dozent" (Associate Professor) for algebra and geometry becoming Full Professor of Pure Mathematics in 1975, and Chairman of the Department of Pure Mathematics 1977 - 91.

During this time he was able to travel extensively and held visiting Professorships in Hungary, Czechoslovakia, USA, Canada, India, Iraq, Italy, France, Vietnam, USSR, Romania, Spain, and the UK. In 1993 he was appointed Professor of Pure Mathematics, at Massey University. In 1994 he was a UNESCO Visitor to Vietnam.

During his research career he published four books and over 120 research papers. Wolfgang was a leading specialist in the field of Commutative Algebra and Algebraic Geometry. At his heart lay the theory of Buchsbaum rings and Intersection Theory. Buchsbaum Rings Theory introduced by him was one of many topics in the above field in the last 20 years. Some hundreds papers were devoted to this topic. His book with J. Stueckrad "Buchsbaum Rings and Applications" is well known to everybody in the field. Intersection Theory has roots going back to the 18th century. His contribution to this theory is enormous. His second book "Lectures On Results On Bezout's Theorem" published by Springer Verlag and his fourth book "Algebraic and Geometric Refined Intersections" which will appear in Cambridge University Press are vivid proof for that. The manuscript of his fourth book, co-authored with Hubert Flenner and Liam O'Carroll, was completed just before he died.

His Commutative Algebra and Algebraic Geometry School in Halle University was strong and famous. Coming here he had much energy and many plans to build up a new school at Massey. It seems incredible that he was denied the opportunity to realise this excellent idea. Wolfgang Vogel was also a well-respected member of Massey University -respected by both staff and students.

It can be said of Wolfgang that he epitomised the ideal academic. He successfully achieved the link between research and teaching and was inspirational in this achievement. At the same time he provided leadership to the Department in his field of pure mathematics (and in particular, algebra). He was fully committed to the Department and undertook administrative duties conscientiously and with concern for the efficiency of the Department.

Because of his research achievements and his reputation as an excellent expositor, Wolfgang was invited to be guest lecturer at many international conferences and workshops in many countries, including our own New Zealand Mathematics Colloquium. He was on the editorial board of professional journals, a responsibility which he felt was important and which he enjoyed.

He was passionate about his mathematics. A man of tremendous energy and determination, he worked extraordinarily hard. Wolfgang was one with whom the term "research professor" could be fittingly associated. You could tell he loved his subject by the way in which he presented it, with great enthusiasm. He was concerned to make his topic understandable with concrete examples. The beauty of pure mathematics was, for him, marvellous; it was a living part of him, it shone through him, and he conveyed it to others.

Wolfgang cared for his students, helping them to develop confidence, much as a father does for his children. Throughout his career he was supervisor of 13 PhD students. Three of them are now also well know in the field: J Stueckrad from University of Leipzig, P Schenzel from Halle University and N V Trung from the Institute of Mathematics, Hanoi. He maintained contact with them and wrote papers with them. He inspired them. His postgraduate students at Massey recall his friendly smile, making himself available to them when they needed him, his concern to help them get financial support, his ability to make them feel that their work was important, introducing them to distinguished visitors. He also made considerable efforts to help undergraduate students, requesting to be involved in teaching at all levels.

Wolfgang's efficient organisation was apparent in his teaching, too. If you've ever attended one of his lectures or seminars you well know the well-structured argument, the careful presentation, the attention to detail. Every theorem proved was a jewel in the crown of the Queen of Science. His humility was evident. Wolfgang would, in his diplomatic manner, never turn aside a question, no matter how trivial it might seem. On 7 April 1995 Wolfgang delivered his Inaugural Professorial Lecture at Massey University. Entitled Appreciating Apollonius: 2000 Years Later, he demonstrated the sheer delight which he found in his subject and gave his audience an historical perspective of his own research on problems sourced in ancient times. He took much pride in the publication of this Lecture some 16 months later (although, much to his chagrin, he discovered a typographical error!).

He was always cheery and optimistic. Even when clearly in ill health he displayed determination and a positive attitude. He exuded optimism till the last moment and tried to make us feel comfortable about his condition. A humble man, very logical, straight to the point, you knew exactly where you stood with him. He was patient, very rarely showing annoyance even in the midst of frustration. Upon reaching agreement or concurrence with others he would say "Everything is OK - everything is fine with me." We shall remember his resounding, jolly laugh in the corridors. His cheery greeting "So...!" as he strode briskly into the Department office will not be forgotten. We shall all miss a warm, openly good-natured friend. He was very loyal to the Department, always referring to it as "our Department".

In three years Wolfgang raised the profile of the pure mathematics programme at Massey enormously. In that area he greatly enhanced the Department's visibility to the world. He brought several eminent visitors and three Postdoctoral Fellows to the Department. New Zealand has lost a top-ranking scholar. The world of academe has lost a highly respected mathematician. However, the uplifting, positive element is the enduring quality seen in Wolfgang Vogel, in his relationships and in his contributions.

When Wolfgang and Dagmar came to Palmerston North, the curiosity of the German community was immediately roused. Professors from Germany we had met before, but a professor from what had been East Germany was a small sensation. When we got to know Wolfgang and Dagmar better, it was soon apparent that their East German background had something to do with the fact that they had come all the way to New Zealand although other possibilities, closer to home, would have been open to them. The years of confinement, interrupted only by the trips he was allowed to make as a scholar, in a small state that had surrounded itself with barbed wire and walls, called for the widest possible horizon that could be spanned. New Zealand was a liberation - both in terms of space and in terms of personal freedom. Wolfgang was happy here and this was visible in the man. He put on weight and ascribed it to the stress-free environment. He wanted to put down his roots here - and together we discussed plans of what we would do after our retirement. He wanted to stay in New Zealand and go north because of the warmer climate.

He was a keen hiker. In shorts, a chequered shirt and a wonderful hat with an enormously wide brim. He looked most unprofessorial! When Wolfgang and Dagmar first went to Santoft beach just behind Bulls, he climbed the highest sand dune, put his arm around Dagmar and just stood there for minutes looking at the arc of the coastline, the sea and the snow-clad Tararua Ranges. There it was, that space and that freedom.

And span a wide horizon he did. Like few others who left Europe behind. The invitations to conferences to top level institutes and universities, his work with students and colleagues world-wide, his reputation world-wide as a brilliant mathematician. This made him a citizen of the world with which he kept in constant touch through the Internet. This is what his Saturday mornings were dedicated to when he would go to his office.

[I acknowledge the notes provided to me from Professors J. McWha, J. Hunter and G. Wake, Associate Professors W.D. Halford and A. Vieregg and Dr.s A. Vogel and L.T. Hoa.]

<div align="right">Mike Hendy</div>