

2002 Award for Distinguished Public Service

The 2002 Award for Distinguished Public Service was presented at the 108th Annual Meeting of the AMS in San Diego in January 2002.

The Award for Distinguished Public Service is presented every two years to a research mathematician who has made a distinguished contribution to the mathematics profession during the preceding five years. The purpose of the award is to encourage and recognize those individuals who contribute their time to public service activities in support of mathematics. The award carries a cash prize of \$4,000.

The Award for Distinguished Public Service is made by the AMS Council, acting on the recommendation of a selection committee. For the 2002 award, the members of the selection committee were: Frederick W. Gehring (chair), Peter D. Lax, D. J. Lewis, Calvin C. Moore, and William Y. Velez.

Previous recipients of the award are: Kenneth M. Hoffman (1990), Harvey B. Keynes (1992), I. M. Singer (1993), D. J. Lewis (1995), Kenneth C. Millett (1998), and Paul J. Sally Jr. (2000).

The 2002 Award for Distinguished Public Service was presented to MARGARET H. WRIGHT. The text that follows presents the selection committee's citation, a brief biographical sketch, and the recipient's response upon receiving the award.

Citation

The 2002 American Mathematical Society Award for Distinguished Public Service is presented to Professor Margaret H. Wright, newly appointed chair of computer science at New York University after fourteen years with the Computing Sciences Research Center at Bell Laboratories.

Professor Wright was elected to the National Academy of Engineering in 1997 and was chosen Emmy Noether Lecturer by the Association for Women in Mathematics and Forsythe Lecturer by the Computer Science Department at Stanford University in 2000.

Among her notable contributions to the federal government are service as chair of the Advisory Committee for the Directorate of Mathematical and Physical Sciences at the National Science

Foundation, as current chair of the Advanced Scientific Computing Advisory Committee for the Department of Energy, and recently as a member of committees of the National Research Council.

Professor Wright's contributions to the scientific community include service as president of SIAM in 1995–96, as cochair of the Scientific Advisory Committee of the MSRI at Berkeley, California, as the current editor-in-chief of the *SIAM Review* and as an associate editor of the *SIAM Journal on Scientific Computation*, the *SIAM Journal on Optimization*, and the IEEE/AIP journal *Computation in Science and Engineering*.

Finally, Professor Wright has been active for many years in encouraging women and minority students, for example, by means of programs that brought them together with leaders and researchers



Margaret H. Wright

from industry to discuss opportunities outside academia.

Biographical Sketch

Margaret H. Wright is professor of computer science and mathematics and chair of the Computer Science Department in the Courant Institute, New York University. From 1988–2001 she was with the Computing Sciences Research Center at Bell Laboratories, Lucent Technologies (formerly AT&T Bell Laboratories), where she was named a Distinguished Member of Technical Staff in 1993 and a Bell Labs Fellow in 1999. She served as head of the Scientific Computing Research Department from 1997–2000. From 1976–1988 she was a research staff member in the Systems Optimization Laboratory, Department of Operations Research, Stanford University.

She received her B.S. in mathematics and her M.S. and Ph.D. in computer science from Stanford University. Her research interests include optimization, linear algebra, numerical and scientific computing, and scientific and engineering applications.

She was elected to the National Academy of Engineering in 1997 and to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences in 2001. During 1995–1996 she served as president of the Society for Industrial and Applied Mathematics (SIAM), and she is now a member of the Board of Trustees; she was previously a member of the SIAM Council and Vice-President at Large. She is chair of the Advisory Committee on Advanced Scientific Computing for the Department of Energy's Office of Science and is currently chair of the peer committee in computer science and engineering at the National Academy of Engineering. She is also a member of the National Science Foundation Blue Ribbon Panel on Cyberinfrastructure. From 1996–2001 she served on the Scientific Advisory Committee of the Mathematical Sciences Research Institute (MSRI) and was cochair during 1999–2001.

In 2000 she was chosen as the Noether Lecturer by the Association for Women in Mathematics and as the Forsythe Lecturer by the Computer Science Department, Stanford University; she also received the Award for Distinguished Service to the Profession from SIAM.

Wright is editor-in-chief of *SIAM Review*, as well as an associate editor of the *SIAM Journal on Scientific Computing*, the *SIAM Journal on Optimization*, *Mathematical Programming*, and *Computing in Science and Engineering*.

Response

It is a great privilege for me to receive the 2002 Award for Distinguished Public Service, and I am deeply grateful to the selection committee and the American Mathematical Society.

Thinking about public service, I would like to echo some thoughts of Don Lewis, the 1995 recipient of

this award and one of my heroes. In his response, Don stressed a point that deserves frequent repetition: Mathematical sciences research will thrive only if constant attention is paid to the multiple environments in which we work and live. Because mathematical scientists function in many different contexts, some broad, some narrow, it follows that public service takes many forms—improving education, encouraging students to pursue careers in mathematics, supporting young people in the mathematical sciences, arguing for funding, sustaining the vitality of scientific societies, and conveying the excitement and importance of scientific research.

Some of the activities mentioned in my citation involve service on committees, and I want to offer a plug for the joys of committee service. Despite the stereotype (undeniably true at times!) that the way not to get something done is to form a committee, being in the room when decisions are made—and they are often made by a committee—does matter. Since our community needs to be involved in discussions at all levels about science policy and education, we also need to be on committees at all levels. Happily, the best committees provide an opportunity to meet fascinating people and to appreciate and understand other points of view.

In everything that I have done, it has been a privilege to work with many outstanding, dedicated individuals. I thank them for providing irrefutable proof that public service can make a difference.