Named Fund Honors Herb Dershem for Service

Posted April 18, 2009

HOLLAND - Dr. Herbert Dershem, who played a leadership role in developing the department of computer science at Hope College, is being recognized through a lasting tribute with a fitting focus: a student research fund in his name.

Alumni and faculty colleagues of the department announced the creation of the "Herb Dershem Summer Research Fund" on Saturday, April 18, during an appropriate milestone, a reception scheduled in celebration of the department's 35-year anniversary. Once fully endowed, the fund will provide support for a student to conduct research full-time with the department for eight to 10 weeks during the summers, joining students who are conducting research in the program through other external and internal sources of support.

Dershem is a professor of computer science and director of institutional research at Hope. He has taught at the college since 1969, five years before the department of computer science was established in 1974, and served as the department's chair from 1975 through 2003. In addition to teaching and helping develop the program's curriculum, he played a significant role in shaping the department's practice of involving students in original, collaborative research projects with members of the faculty.

"During his 40 years at Hope, Herb has had a significant impact on hundreds of people," said Dr. Ryan McFall, an associate professor of computer science who has taught at Hope since 2000 - and who as a 1993 Hope graduate is also one of Dershem's former students. "My life certainly would not be the same without his teaching and mentoring."

"The summer research program at Hope is one of our department's distinctives, and something very close to Herb's heart, so we thought it fitting to target giving for this purpose," McFall said.

Dershem held appointments in both mathematics and computer science before becoming department chair and an associate professor of computer science in 1975. He was promoted to full professor in 1981, and from January to July 2005 served as interim dean for the natural sciences at Hope.

Through the years he administered multiple grants to the department from the National Science Foundation (NSF) in support of the summer research program, and mentored numerous students as co-investigators in his own research work. He has written several articles published in journals, and co-authored the book "Programming Languages: Structures and Models" with colleague Dr. Michael Jipping. In 2002 the college presented him with the "Provost's Award for Excellence in Teaching," today known as the "Janet L. Andersen Excellence in Teaching Award."

He has served as director of institutional research at the college since 2007. He is also directing a three-year, National Science Foundation-funded scholarship program that supports students who transfer to Hope to major in biology, chemistry, computer science, engineering, the geological and environmental sciences, mathematics or physics after completing work at a community college.

Dershem completed his bachelor's degree in mathematics in 1965 at the University of Dayton, and his master's and doctorate in computer science at Purdue University in 1967 and 1969 respectively. In addition to his teaching at Hope, he has held visiting appointments with the Oak Ridge National Laboratories, the Boston University Overseas Program and the United States Air Force Academy, and an associate appointment with the United States Open University.

The college first offered computer science coursework in the latter 1960s as an offering in the department of mathematics: Math 27, beginning FORTRAN. Today the department has four full-time faculty, and degree options include a Bachelor of

Arts or Bachelor of Science in computer science as well as (through the department of engineering) a Bachelor of Science in engineering with a computer engineering emphasis.

Fundraising is continuing to fully endow the "Herb Dershem Summer Research Fund." Those interested in providing support may obtain additional information by contacting the college's office of college advancement at (616) 395-7775.

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