

# INFOCUS

## PROFESSOR EMERITUS OF MATHEMATICS STILL SUPPORTS HIGHER EDUCATION

### Tom Markham Scholarship Fund is Thriving



Tom Markham

“One of my favorite quotes,” says Professor Emeritus of Mathematics Tom Markham, “is Thomas Jefferson’s observation that ‘if a nation expects to be ignorant and free, it expects what never was and never will be.’ Higher education is such an essential component of a healthy society, and our students truly deserve the best

education we can give them.”

Markham has personally done a great deal to provide educational opportunities for students at Carolina. In addition to his 32 years of teaching, he now makes regular contributions to a scholarship fund that was established in his name upon his retirement in 1999. “We have some really excellent students in the math department,” he says. “I just want to do my part to help these students, who I think are going to make wonderful contributions to society.” To date, the scholarship, which is merit-based, has been won by four students. “All of them have been outstanding,” Markham says, noting that the first recipient is now working on a Ph.D. in math at Washington University in St. Louis. “It just makes sense to me,” he adds, “that if a student has additional financial support and doesn’t have to hold a job, it can make a big difference in his or her academic performance.”

Despite being technically retired, Markham also continues to make other significant contributions to the academic life of the University. A noted scholar in the field of linear algebra, he is still actively publishing and providing peer review for others in his field. He also serves as a member of the Board of Visitors for the College of Arts and Sciences, providing input

to the college’s administration on various major initiatives that will shape its future. “When Dean Fitzpatrick invited me to join the board,” he says, “it seemed like a wonderful opportunity to do something really worthwhile, and to see what the big plans for the college are.”

His service on the board has, he says, also led to a new appreciation of what makes the college special. “One thing that struck me from our very first board meeting,” he notes, “is the extent of the cooperation between departments in the college, which opens the door for all kinds of exciting interdisciplinary research. Our faculty in the math department, for example, are partnering with faculty in biology, physics, statistics, computer science—I see more of that kind of collaboration going on all the time. And to me it’s a very good sign, because it means the college is a true microcosm of the world itself. We all have to deal with people in different walks of life, and if you bring experts together from various disciplines, who knows what new things can happen.”

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For Markham, giving back to the college and the University is also a way of repaying an institution that has meant a lot to him. Scholars at his level always have opportunities to teach elsewhere if they so desire, but Markham says he never

had any inclination to leave Carolina. "What kept me here above all else," he notes, "was the camaraderie in the math department, which has always been very close-knit. I still feel very at home here." He also appreciates the rich array of cultural events the University offers. "It's wonderful for me to see the theatre performances here, and the music events, and I enjoy the sports too," he says. This year's football team's declining fortunes caught him even more off guard than they did most people, though, as he was in New Zealand for much of October and November. "Carolina was ranked No. 6 the day we left," he recalls, "so it was a shock when I saw a newspaper a few weeks later and they weren't ranked at all."

The trip to New Zealand was just one of many Markham has taken over the years. Altogether, he estimates that he has been to more than 70 countries, among which he cites Egypt, Syria, and the Czech Republic as favorites. "The antiquities in Syria and Egypt are amazing," he says. "And Prague, which I've visited many times, is probably my favorite place. Unlike so many other Eastern European cities, it came through World War II with very little damage, so its old buildings are largely intact. And it has such a history as a crossroads of Europe."

As if travel, scholarship, and service to the University were not enough to keep him busy, Markham also has a particularly challenging hobby: he is writing a detective novel. "It's a lark," he says. "I love reading mysteries, and I wanted to see how creative I could be in that line. It's coming along slowly, but I should be able to finish it next year."