

Dr. George Lenchner

(December 16, 1917 - April 23, 2006)

Dr. George Lenchner may have been the most influential mathematics educator in Long Island history. He wrote textbooks for Houghton Mifflin and other school publishers. He was the driving force behind the creation of the Nassau County Interscholastic Mathematics League in 1954, the Nassau County Junior Mathematics League in 1960, the Nassau County Association of Mathematics Supervisors in 1962, the Mathematical Olympiads for Elementary and Middle Schools (MOEMS) in 1979, and the AP Calculus workshops held every May and September. The overwhelming demand for his workshops, *The Art of Problem Solving*, which changed the way many teachers thought about math, led him to recruit two other leading math teachers to handle the increased enrollment. His last three books are still widely used: *Math Olympiad Contest Problems for Elementary and Middle Schools*, *Creative Problem Solving in School Mathematics*, and, with Judy Broadwin and Marty Rudolph, the series *Solutions, AP Calculus AB & BC, Part II*. He used MOEMS and his S-corporation, Glenwood Publications, to publish and distribute these books.

In 1958 his article in the *Mathematics Teacher* led to the founding of many similar math leagues all over the country, including the Suffolk County Interscholastic Mathematics League under Al Kalfus. The resulting Nassau-Suffolk playoffs lasted for eleven years and may have been responsible for the formation of the New York State Mathematics League and eventually, the American Regions Mathematics League.

In the days following his death, several people contacted MOEMS, saying that he changed their lives. Certainly that is true for all of us at the Olympiads as well as hundreds of teachers who dedicated themselves to the goals of the organizations listed above. As a teacher, chairman, and director of mathematics in the Valley Stream Central HS District, he influenced thousands of students, some profoundly. Among his former students are many prominent mathematics educators.

Dr. Lenchner had distinguished himself in many diverse areas before becoming a teacher. He was a member of a championship high school math team in the mid-1930s and was All-America in Lacrosse at City College of New York. On D-day, 1944 as an Airborne Ranger, Lt. Lenchner was seriously wounded on Omaha Beach while leading the second wave, and spent over a year in hospitals. Returning to civilian life, he earned a Masters degree in music in 1948 from NYU. Finally he decided to focus on mathematics education, returning to his first love.

In 1950 he became a high school mathematics teacher at New Utrecht High School in Brooklyn, moving to Valley Stream North High School in 1953 as its math department head. Then came the flood of achievements listed above, among others. The NCIML, NCAMS, and NCJIML are still flourishing after some 50 years, and MOEMS has gained international stature, inspiring teachers and students on five continents to study problem solving.

In 1965 he received a second Master's Degree, an MS in Mathematics from Adelphi University and in 1972 he earned an Ed.D. in Mathematics from T.C. Columbia University.

In 1970 he became Director of Mathematics in Valley Stream, working with elementary

schools for the first time. His in-service course, *The Art of Problem Solving for Elementary Teachers* eventually became a book for Houghton Mifflin, one of many books and articles that he authored or coauthored for major academic publishers.

In 1978 Dr. Lenchner created the Math Olympiads for the elementary schools in Valley Stream. However, requests from other math directors during the pilot year led to the creation of LIMOES, later MOEMS, in 1979. By 1980 it attracted schools in Arkansas, Washington State, and Canada, outgrowing Long Island. Continued rapid growth convinced him and his secretary, Selma Landsberg, to retire in 1983 in order to concentrate full-time on the Math Olympiads. Today MOEMS serves schools in all fifty states, three U.S. territories, and about thirty foreign countries. It also has seven foreign affiliates, serving thousands of additional schools in twenty-one other countries.

In 1982, Dr. Lenchner and Judy Broadwin coauthored an immensely popular solutions manual for the Advanced Placement examinations in Calculus. Five years after its final printing, it still sells thousands of copies a year. From 1984 to 1992 he acted as consultant to Dr. Jong Pil Lee of the College at Old Westbury for several more projects to improve mathematics education on Long Island. In 1995, having trained a successor, Dr. Lenchner retired from MOEMS and wrote two more books, both of which are still in print. During all this, he found time to maintain his own greenhouse, growing many unusual and interesting plants.

Among his honors are: National Science Foundation Fellow; HEW Department Fellow; Mathematics Teacher of the Year Award, NYS Society of Professional Engineers; Distinguished Secondary School Teaching Award, Harvard University; Distinguished Achievement Award for Excellence in Educational Journalism, EPA of America; Founder's Award for Outstanding Service, NCIML; LIMACON Award for Outstanding Contributions to Mathematics Education, Long Island Mathematics Conference; Goudreau Award for Outstanding Contributions to Mathematics Education, Goudreau Museum of Mathematics and Science.

On April 22, 2006, a fall led to unconsciousness. The next evening, surrounded by his loving family, he passed away peacefully, after 88 years of outstanding health. He leaves behind his wife, Edna of San Francisco; his son David and wife Ellen Lenchner of Santa Rosa, CA; son Eric and Marie Lenchner of Oakland, CA; David's daughter Maya, her husband Scott Einziger, and their son Jack, all of New York; and David and Ellen's sons Nicholas and Skyler, also of Santa Rosa. A small service was held for Dr. Lenchner in San Francisco on May 7 and a larger memorial is planned for June 4 in Oakland for those who must make travel arrangements. The family requests any donations be made to the Southern Poverty Law Center, www.splcenter.org.

In Memoriam,

Richard Kalman
Executive Director

John Lufrano
Executive Secretary