EULER BOOK PRIZE

The Euler Book Prize is given to the author or authors of an outstanding book about mathematics. Mathematical monographs at the undergraduate level, histories, biographies, works of mathematical fiction, and anthologies are among those types of books eligible for the prize. They shall be judged on clarity of exposition and the degree to which they have had or show promise of having a positive impact on the public's view of mathematics in the United States and Canada. A textbook, though not normally eligible for this award, could be recognized if the Committee on the Euler Book Prize is convinced that it is innovative, distinctive, well written, and very likely to have a long-standing impact on mathematics.

The prize was established in 2005 and will be given every year at a national meeting of the Association, beginning in 2007, the 300th anniversary of the birth of Leonhard Euler. This award also honors Virginia and Paul Halmos, whose generosity made the award possible.

Citation
Benjamin H. Yandell

The Honors Class. Hilbert's Problems and Their Solvers, A K Peters, Natick, MA, 2002.

Ben Yandell began writing this book in 1992 when he asked himself, "Whatever happened to Hilbert's Problems?" *The Honors Class* is his answer to that question, and it tells more about modern mathematics than one would have thought possible in a coherent narrative. With amazing persistence, Yandell located, interviewed, or corresponded with scores of Hilbert's mathematical descendents to create a full and faithful picture of twentieth-century mathematical life.

As its subtitle states, *The Honors Class* is about Hilbert's problems and their solvers. Each chapter contains biographies of the main contributors to the problem under discussion, skillfully interwoven with the mathematics. It is possible to read the book for the biographies alone, as they are beautifully written and laced with anecdotes of all kinds—spicy, funny, surprising, and poignant. The biographies have more than entertainment value, however. They genuinely add to our understanding of the Hilbert problems by tracing the development of ideas as they spread from person to person and country to country.

Even when discussing well-known mathematicians such as Hilbert, Gödel, and Kolmogorov, Yandell manages to say something fresh and to correct some oft-repeated errors. The book is a monumental labor of love, yet breathtakingly readable and inspiring. It is written at a level that bright mathematics students

can understand, but it will also widen the horizons of professional mathematicians, since almost no one is as familiar with as many fields as Hilbert was. *The Honors Class* should be in every mathematician's library.

Biographical Note

Two years after publication of *The Honors Class*, Ben Yandell died at the age of fifty-three in Pasadena, California. Eleven years earlier he had received word he had multiple sclerosis, but this disease apparently did not contribute to his early death. After his undergraduate education at Occidental College and Stanford University, he chose not to pursue doctoral studies in mathematics but instead wrote poetry and became a television repairman. He also sat in on graduate courses in physics at Caltech. *The Honors Class* was inspired by his having read Constance Reid's *Hilbert*. At the time of his death he was working on two books, a biography of John von Neumann and a book on solitons that he was encouraged to write by Sir Michael Atiyah. He is survived by his daughter, Kate Louise, now nine years old, and his wife, Janet Nippell, with whom he coauthored his first book, *Mostly on Foot: A Year in L.A.*