

Richard Aron – the mathematician (an introduction)

In the early 80's Kent State University was stagnating mathematically. We'd lost positions through retirements and the administration didn't replace those who'd left. Then we had a position open and we got the go-ahead to fill the position BUT no money to truly recruit. It was decided that maybe we should bring someone in as a visitor with an eye to hiring them if all worked out.

That year I revisited Ireland; while there Richard approached me about writing a letter on his behalf to Cleveland State, where they too had a visiting position and he had the inside track on the job--the problem was he'd been teaching in Ireland and their administration feared foreigners! Could he speak English? I said OK and wrote the letter. To save time I brought the letter back to the States to mail it. On my return, our Assistant Chair, Charles Cleaver, found out about Richard and Cleveland State, Now Charles was at Kentucky when Richard was a young faculty member there and he was enthusiastic about Richard. The decision was made to offer Richard our visiting position.

He accepted our offer.

He was here for less than a month and there was a complete agreement among the faculty that Richard should be offered the tenured position at an Associate Professor level. The offer was made.

He accepted our offer.

His presence on our faculty signaled a change of culture. He was a positive force for hiring quality teaching researchers in Mathematics. The first true test came early on when we once again had a visiting position. The department had Richard, Alfred Cavaretta and myself look at the applicants and give a short list of (strong) candidates. We proceeded independently and when the time came, Richard and I had decided to push for the same mathematician--Andrew Tonge. It goes without saying that Kent made Andrew an offer to visit (with an eye to a tenure-track position).

He accepted our offer.

Is there a pattern here? You betcha.

In 1985 we hosted an International Conference on Banach Spaces and Classical Analysis; Richard and I worked together on this two week extravaganza. As Grahame Bennett noted, we had more Salem prize winners than at most conferences in harmonic analysis! More than 300 mathematical analysts attended, with 60 hour talks. Throughout the meeting, regardless of what minor catastrophe threatened, Richard was there to calm the nerves. The conference was a success and Kent State benefited enormously from it. Among the treasures to be found in this experience was the approach two years later of one Per Enflo, wondering if perhaps Kent State would consider hiring him! Richard was spending the '86-'87 AY in Dublin but Andrew Tonge (who came to Kent as a result of the serendipitous occurrence of Richard and I agreeing on a candidate) and I were able to gather letters from mathematicians from throughout Europe and the States in Per's behalf. Kent State offered Per a position as University Professor.

He accepted our offer.

The pattern has continued to this very day. Despite changes in (inept) administrations, Richard has always stayed the course and helped guide our Department to improve. In my opinion, his appointment was the most important the Mathematics Department at Kent State has ever made.

All the while Richard was active (and effective) in changing our culture, he wouldn't have been nearly as effective if he'd not been an extremely strong research mathematician. A look at his CV reveals an extensive list of papers published in high quality journals with multiple co-authors. As he's aged, his production hasn't slowed down; rather, his involvement in mathematical affairs has increased manifold. During the past few years he's been Editor-in-Chief of the Journal of Mathematical Analysis and Applications, a journal that continues to gain international recognition--due in large part to Richard's careful guidance.

His efforts have been selfless. Of my Ph. D. students at least six came to Kent through Richard's influence. He has attracted many others who worked with someone in our analysis group, not necessarily Richard; all, though, of our graduate students freely admit Richard's kindnesses and mathematical influence on their work.

Written by Joe Diestel in October 2014.