

## In memory of Prof. J. Necas

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I do not recall exactly when I first met professor Jindrich Necas, but I know he arrived at Northern Illinois University when I was vice provost for graduate studies and research and dean of the graduate school.

I learned a great deal about him, however, and had occasion to communicate with him, in the spring of 1997 - after he had been at Northern Illinois university for about half a dozen years and was a full professor with tenure.

At that time, he had been nominated for a University award we call the presidential research professorship. Only three presidential research professors are named each year, and in 1997 there were 20 candidates for this honor. Professor Necas was nominated by colleagues on the faculty of the Department of Mathematical Sciences. As chair of the selection committee, it was my job to secure information about him that would enable that committee to judge whether he had achieved the national and international research eminence that qualifies a professor for that award.

I received a written summary of his research accomplishments - one of the longer summaries I can recall coming to the selection committee during the 18 years I served as committee chair. From that I learned that he had published nine books and well over 150 scholarly papers - in English, in French, in German, in Italian, in Russian, and in Czech. And I learned that those publications covered a variety of mathematical topics in which his work had international influence.

Also, as part of the presidential research professorship selection process, I asked dr. Necas to recommend some distinguished mathematicians, from outside of this university, to serve as references, and to assist the committee in evaluating his scholarly achievements.

Candidates for presidential research professorships typically gave me the names of three to five references. Professor Necas gave me a list of 13: 13 outstanding mathematical researchers in the United States, in France, in Germany, in Switzerland, and in Italy.

My experience in communicating with scholars overseas is that my letters may take a long time to reach them and that their responses may take a long time to reach me. Also, scholars of eminence are often away from their home institutions. Therefore, I wrote to all thirteen on the list, hoping to hear from half of them. To my delight, all of them replied to my invitation to assess the research accomplishments of Jindrich Necas. And they were extensive and unstinting in their praise.

As Professor Necas was on a sabbatical leave in Europe while the selection process proceeded that spring, I was in communication with him by e-mail. In that correspondence, he was always gracious and forthcoming; and, when I informed him that he had been selected for this award, he assured me that it would give him much pleasure to return to the U.S. in time to receive it from the president of the university at the graduate school's commencement ceremony of May 10, 1997.

I saw professor Necas only occasionally over the last five years. I knew of the challenges to his health, from my conversations with some of his colleagues, such as professors William Blair and Harvey Blau. When I did see him, however, he was always up-beat, informing me,

with some enthusiasm, that he was still working on important research problems. (But, he asserted that he was not as quick to solve them as he was when he was younger).

There have been five presidential research professors in the Department of mathematical sciences, from 1990 until the present. The other four can be proud to be in a select group that included Jindrich Necas. We could use more like him, not one fewer. He will be missed.