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In Memoriam: Father Tom

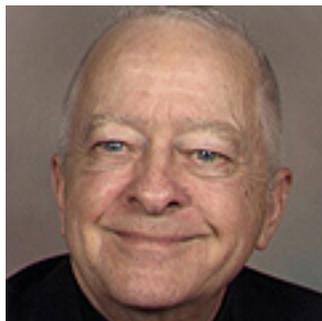
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In Memoriam: Father Tom

04.16.2010 | Faculty, Catholic

The Rev. Thomas A. Schoen, S.M., a pioneer in computer science education, who founded one of the oldest computer science programs in the nation at the University of Dayton, died Wednesday, April 14, at Mercy Siena Gardens in Dayton.

Schoen, 78, taught computer science and math at the University for more than 50 years and served as department chair for more than 17 years until 1983. He was active in teaching until 2006 and was named professor emeritus upon his retirement in 2009.

"Father Tom was known as 'Mr. IT' back in the days before UD IT even existed," said James Buckley, associate professor of computer science. "His importance to the University, the college and the department cannot be overstated."

Buckley said Schoen, who initially taught math, developed a strong interest in computers in the late 1950s, when the field was in its infancy, and initiated the degree program in 1961 out of that pioneering interest. Buckley said the program was one of the first 10 computer science departments in the nation.

Born in Sioux City, Iowa, Schoen first professed religious vows in 1951, serving many years as a Marianist brother, and was ordained as a priest in 1987 at the Immaculate Conception Chapel on the University of Dayton campus. He was closely associated with the Sawmill community of Marianists on campus, and had moved to Mercy Siena a few months ago.

He graduated from the University of Dayton in 1954 with a bachelor's degree in math and physics. He taught math and physics for three years at Chaminade High School in Dayton. He received a master's degree in mathematics in 1959 from the University of Cincinnati and he returned to the University of Dayton in 1959 to begin his teaching career, where he was known for his academic rigor.

"The discipline he imposed upon himself was also imposed on his students, and they were the better for it," said Buckley. "In his simple and humble way, he gained the affection of all who came in contact with him."

Kathy Tamer, who received a bachelor's in computer science in 1973, remembered Schoen as "a pathfinder, a leader and a taskmaster."

"As his computer science student in the early years of computing (way back in 1969), he opened our eyes to the wonders of computers and challenged us to excel beyond what we felt possible," she said. "Although not immediately obvious to us as freshman, he cared as much, if not more, for us as people than as students. As we walked across the stage to receive our diploma, he was proud of us both as individuals and as a class."

"You can imagine my surprise when I walked into his office 30 years later and he recognized me," Tamer, now vice president and chief information officer for United Space Alliance in Houston. "I am grateful for the many lessons I learned under his tutelage and will remember him always."

Services are pending.

For more information, contact Cilla Shindell, director of media relations, at 937-229-3257 or shindell@udayton.edu (url: <mailto:shindell@udayton.edu>).