

Dr. Van Kelly

Retired Houghton math professor Jake Jacobson recalls Dr. Van Kelly as a courteous and diligent student who stood out for his warm demeanor and his exceptional work. Since graduation, Van has translated these traits into a successful career in software research and development, followed by his current role as a clinical professor at Yeshiva University.

A member of our Class of 1973, Van graduated summa cum laude, with a major in mathematics and a double minor in both physics and German. He went on to earn his Master of Arts in mathematics from Arizona State University, and a PhD in computer science from Rutgers University.

Van spent over fifteen years as a computer scientist and software engineer in the private sector, where he earned a reputation as a dedicated and dependable colleague. After holding senior research and development positions at Bell Labs, Motorola, and FiberControl, he returned to academia at Yeshiva University in 2010 to teach computer science from an industrial perspective.

Van exudes a spirit of conscientious modesty, perhaps best exemplified by the way in which he speaks about his own work. He is reluctant to sing his own praises, and quick to clarify instances of research and projects that were

outmoded by new technological developments. But conversations with Van's colleagues make it clear what a profound impact he has made.

Judah Diament, chair of computer science at Yeshiva University, describes Van as a priceless asset and ally who has played a key role in shaping the direction of their department. "Van is a rock-solid computer scientist," says Diament, "with decades of industry experience and a dedication to sharing that knowledge and expertise with students."

Colleague Ed Berliner, who worked with Van earlier in their careers and now serves as the pre-engineering chair at Yeshiva, recalled bringing Van on for a project with Bell Labs. He was impressed not only by Van's skills as a computer scientist, but also his winning demeanor and his ability to engage with the people around him. "You can never have enough smart, nice people," Berliner says, "and Van was the smartest and nicest guy around. . . . With his incredible insight, knowledge, and grace, he impressed everyone and soon became indispensable."

Since graduation, Van has retained an active connection to Houghton, faithfully and generously investing in this place. He was a charter member of the 1883 Society, and he also provided the fine collection of books in Houghton's mathematics library.

Van, the impact you've had on those around you testifies to the Christlike character you have cultivated throughout your life. As a professor, your gracious demeanor and your servant's heart have earned the respect of colleagues and students alike. For your faithfulness in your vocation, both inside and outside of academia, we are pleased to present you with the Distinguished Alumni Achievement Award.