

Ben Rafoth: 2002 Ron Maxwell Award Winner

By Kristin J. Smith

In front of five hundred writing tutors and writing center directors, Ben Rafoth, director of the Indiana University of Pennsylvania Writing Center, became the fourth recipient of the 2002 NCPTW Ron Maxwell Award for Distinguished Leadership in Promoting the Collaborative Learning Practices of Peer Tutors in Writing. Dr. Rafoth accepted the award during the 2002 National Conference on Peer Tutoring in Writing (NCPTW) and Midwest Writing Centers Association (MWCA) conference hosted by the University of Kansas in Lawrence.

“I am proud to be the winner of the Ron Maxwell Award,” Ben Rafoth later commented. “When I won, I was thinking of the past winners, Molly Wingate, Jean Kiedaisch, and Kevin Davis. Those three people have accomplished a lot, and when Jon [Olson] told me I’d won, it was a very pleasant surprise and I hoped I could live up to people’s expectations of me for the 2003 conference.”

Although Dr. Rafoth did not initially aspire to direct a writing center, he had always been interested in being a writing teacher. Dr. Rafoth fell into the role of writing center director in 1988, a year after obtaining a permanent faculty position at IUP. He recounts being drawn to the position because he would be able to continue to work with former students and because the writing center was one of the first locations on campus to have a computer lab available to students. Currently Dr. Rafoth teaches both undergraduate and graduate courses on theories of composition and literacy, as well as research methods.

Dr. Rafoth solicited tutors and directors to write chapters which he edited and compiled in *A Peer Tutor’s Guide: Helping Writers One to One* (Heinemann Boynton/Cook), a practical guide that often serves as a training guide for tutors. The book addresses common concerns tutors may have such as engaging reluctant writers and tutoring emotionally charged situations. *A Peer Tutor’s Guide* continues to be well received by writing center communities.

Presently Dr. Rafoth is undertaking the enormous task of hosting next year’s joint International Writing Centers Association (IWCA) and NCPTW conference on October 23-25 in Hershey, Pennsylvania. He volunteered to host after friends and associates Harvey Kail and Jon Olson persuaded the two organizations to work together. Rebecca Moore Howard, an expert in plagiarism issues, is the scheduled keynote speaker. Dr. Rafoth refurbished the conference format this year by adding endnote speakers, Penn State graduate students Aesha Adams and Howard Ramsby.

In hosting the 2003 IWCA-NCPTW conference, Ben Rafoth upholds the image of the Ron Maxwell Award: promoting collaborative education, leading within the writing center community, and dedicating his career to learning.