

Credit students say 'goodbye' to Mr. Math

BY SID RODAWAY

They call him Mr. Math.

After 32 years at Port Credit Secondary School Frank Munro can still remember the names of students he taught during the war. He retires at the end of the month.

When his five Grade 13 mathematics classes completed their course of study two weeks ago, they lined up to shake his hand. For thousands Frank Munro opened up the world of mathematics and in some cases altered their lives.

"I believe the analytical lessons learned in math can be applied to daily life," Munro philosophizes. One very successful businessman he taught before the war at Lakefield High School north of Peterborough told him recently that whenever he makes a major decision, "I always ask myself what would Mr. M do in this case."

"That makes you feel good," smiles Munro. He admits that teaching provides few episodes of recognition but those few are worth it.

"A lot of people find themselves as a square peg in a round hole," goes his homespun theory. "But I haven't; my life work has been worthwhile and I'm happy."

At 60 he could go on for a few more years but Munro sees this sequence in his life reaching its natural end. 'Most sequences are finite' is what I like to tell my students and I'm on a finite sequence right now."

His only regret is the loss of "that close connection with young stimulating minds." Being near them has kept him young.

He ran Port Credit High's physical education department from 1942 to 1945 and coached the rugby, basketball, hockey, track and field and baseball teams. The lessons he learned then were incorporated into his approach to the teaching of mathematics.

"Math is a game we play with different rules for different games and the only way to win is to get out and play by the rules."

Comparing the students of today with those of "the good old days", Munro vastly prefers the former.

"They're hard to beat on a

human level. They took a personal interest in me and my retirement when classes ended — 25 years ago they would have been too abashed to do that."

His main complaint about the student of 1973 is his more casual approach to learning and somewhat lower devotion to study.

Munro is critical of the total freedom of subject choice offered high school

students now. He feels a re-emphasis of basic core subjects is in the offing. "Too often the student seeks the line of least resistance in his choice of subjects."

The so-called New Math has both its benefits and drawbacks, he claims "I think it's been good at showing how math develops. It provides a greater insight into what mathematics really is but sacrifices were

made in the areas of review and repetition when the system was introduced."

He hopes for the day when school sizes are reduced to about 900 students. When he started at the old Forest Avenue location of the original Port Credit High School there in 1941, enrolment was 350 — now it's 1,400.

The days of being "chief cook and bottle washer," are

long gone but school spirit and the personal contact of the smaller unit have gone with them, Munro says.

"Let's face it the good student can do well in any system but I worry now about the loners — the faceless kids in the crowd who can't swim on their own."

After 22 years as math department head Munro has nothing but respect and

praise for his fellow teachers. "By and large they are one of the finest groups of people I could associate with."

But he sees retirement as just another phase in life. "I've cut myself off voluntarily, I have to start another phase."

"Mr. Math" will leave his mark on the department. He hand picked the crew — including his replacement.

MUNRO, Frank