Kenneth Jerome Tiahrt, PhD, joined the Department of Mathematics (now the Department of Mathematical Sciences) at Montana State University in 1967. For the next 27 years until he retired in 1994, Ken was a dedicated mentor and farsighted leader in the Department that was expanding from its tradition of exceptional undergraduate and service teaching into graduate training through the PhD level, fundamental and applied research, innovative education, and professional service. By the time Ken retired, the Department was widely recognized in all those areas. Especially during his 16 years as the Head of the Department (1977–1993), Ken's energetic and imaginative guidance was well-suited to MSU as it successfully transitioned from an undergraduate college to a dynamic research institution.

Ken Tiahrt in 1994

Ken was a dedicated representative of the three academic programs in the Department: mathematics, statistics, and mathematics/statistics education. He was a staunch advocate for the Department's faculty and staff and he championed funding appropriate to the Department's ever-increasing instructional responsibilities. He elevated the statistics program and the education program, especially education outreach to K-12 schools across the state. He enabled the mathematics program's growth in applied mathematics in the evolving digital world.

During Ken's headship, the mathematical science fields were transformed by powerful computational advances. Early on he perceived the necessity of modern computer equipment and knowledgeable staff on par with these resources found at peer institutions. Initially, he purchased a few word processors and personal computers for sharing. But, as computer capabilities and expenses accelerated, Ken and the faculty had to work continuously to maintain up-to-date computational facilities. Because of their persistence and resourcefulness, the Department's instructors and researchers kept pace with advancing computer technologies.

Ken advocated interdisciplinary, collaborative teaching and research. He promoted a statistical consulting program through which the department assisted researchers across the campus and he facilitated a math learning center to assist undergraduate students in their courses. Ken volunteered for professional service, both regionally and nationally, and successfully encouraged the faculty to volunteer. The department sponsored conferences, regional meetings, and prestigious invited speakers. Altogether, these efforts enhanced the reputation of the Department and helped it recruit excellent students and faculty as well as acquire research funding from state and federal agencies.

Throughout his time as Department Head, Ken displayed a high regard for the Department's graduate teaching assistants, non-tenure track professionals, and classified staff. He knew that, although people in those positions were under-rewarded by the system, they were essential to the success of the Department. He understood the difficulties and challenges of their jobs and he strove to provide a positive, supportive work environment for them. On those occasions when a calamity hit a Department employee, Ken would create and coordinate a departmental assistance plan. His communication style was direct and honest. He cultivated an administrative team that respected one another and worked well together. The team was competent, steadfast, and constructive. It provided a cheerful optimism that fostered the Department's many successes.

In recognition of Professor Ken Tiahrt's contributions to MSU and his high regard for all the personnel that supported the faculty in the Department, the **Kenneth J. Tiahrt Fund** was established in 2017. The fund provides resources for the professional improvement of graduate students, non-tenure track faculty, and staff in the Department of Mathematical Sciences.