

# Meet your new AAPT president: John Layman

John M. Fowler

*National Science Teachers Association, Washington, D.C. 20009*

In late 1958, while I was a young assistant professor of physics at Washington University, in St. Louis, and burning with idealism, I accepted an invitation to talk about “fallout” from nuclear weapons testing to a convocation at Park College in Kansas City. After the talk, sitting over beers with some of the Park scientists, I was introduced to a recent Park graduate who was teaching physics nearby (at East High School in Kansas City, Missouri). He didn’t want to talk about fallout but about physics teaching. Ten or so years later, when he walked into my Commission on College Physics Office at the University of Maryland he still wanted to talk about physics teaching. And as far as I could tell he was still excited and enthusiastic about it. That dedication and enthusiasm sets John Layman apart and because of it he has been able to contribute consistently and importantly to improvement in his chosen field. And his enthusiasm and “hands on” approach to physics teaching made each of our many discussions and informal collaborations while we were both on the Maryland physics faculty enjoyable and instructive. I have valued and used the connection since I moved on.

John Layman was born in Moline, Illinois, received his undergraduate education at Park and was introduced to PSSC as a Masters graduate student at Temple University the year before we met. He taught high school physics for six years in Kansas City, teaching both the college bound and the general student. When his school district failed to match his own enthusiasm for the newer physics teaching approaches he entered a doctoral program in science education (on a physics assistantship) at Oklahoma State University. Upon receiving his doctoral degree in 1970 he accepted a joint appointment in physics and education at the University of Maryland.

A joint appointment between a discipline-oriented department and a school of education is akin to walking through the woods wearing horns during deer season. But John’s tact, his good humor, and the solid competence he demonstrates in both areas has protected him from pot shots. His responsibility in the Physics Department is to help develop the teaching competence of teaching assistants as well as to teach some of the introductory courses. In education he supervises and works with those who are going on as physics teachers. Maryland is to be congratulated for supporting this rare joint effort.

John Layman has invested time in organizing physics teachers as well as in teaching them. His association with the AAPT began in the early sixties when he served as Secretary-Treasurer of a newly invigorated Missouri Section. But his major focus has been on physics teachers in



JOHN LAYMAN

the laboratory. He has been one of the leaders in developing “kit workshops” – “take it home when you’re finished” – first in integrated circuitry and presently with micro-computers. John has also served an AAPT apprenticeship with the Committee on Precollege Physics.

I asked him recently what he saw as the most important challenge facing AAPT. His reply, “We have to come up with some specific programs for dealing with the shortage of high school physics teachers,” set me back. I had a strong sense of *déjà vu*; that was our challenge in the late 50s and 60s. The reasons are different now, high salaries in industry attract the smaller number of graduating physics students instead of the university and research positions which were calling then. But the results are the same. Only a few high school students take physics and our technology and culture suffer.

When John is asked about his leisure-time interests, he sighs nostalgically for the serene days when he could take his family canoeing, hiking, and mountain-climbing.

Continued on page 130

## Meet your new president

Continued from page 78

He says, "For the last couple of years all my spare time has been spent studying computer languages!" Ellen Layman and John have been married for twenty-five years and have two grown sons, John and Jeff.

In turning over the reins to John Layman for a year, the AAPT has chosen a man for the times. In this ebb tide of support for science education his "do it yourself" approach will be important. He offers a unique link between physics and its teachers. It is reassuring to know that we will hear his deep voice booming from the AAPT dais for awhile and guiding us with humor, experience, and undeviating dedication.