



Dr. Kenneth Hedberg

February 2, 1920 - January 5, 2019

Dr. Kenneth Hedberg, OSU Chemistry Professor, husband, father, grandfather, colleague and friend, died peacefully at home on January 5, 2019, less than one month shy of his 99th birthday.

Born in Portland, Oregon to Gustave and Ruth Haagsma Hedberg, Ken was the oldest of two children. He was raised first in Portland, then in Hoquiam, Washington, and finally in Medford, Oregon where he finished high school.

The young Ken was not sure what field of science to pursue. Ever pragmatic, he checked out chemistry, biology and physics books from the library, sat down and poured through them, concluding that he was best at chemistry. His course was thus set for life.

Graduating from OSU during World War II, Ken sought and received military deferment in order to put his knowledge of chemistry to use in the war effort. For the duration of the war, he worked at Shell Development Co., researching ways to make synthetic rubber, and finding additives to keep fuels stored in the North African desert from exploding.

After the war, Ken resumed his training in chemistry, studying under Linus Pauling and Verner Shoemaker at the California Institute of Technology, and earning his Ph.D. in chemistry and physics in 1948.

After completing his Ph.D., Ken was awarded both Fulbright and Guggenheim Fellowships to pursue his research in Norway. It was there he met fellow chemist, Lise Smedvik, whom he married in Oslo in 1954. Lise was his most important scientific colleague and collaborator for more than 40 years.

In 1956, the young newlyweds moved to Oregon and OSU, putting down their professional and personal roots for life.

Most of Ken's long and productive life was centered in Corvallis at Oregon State University, starting with his undergraduate studies in chemistry, completed in 1942. As a Professor of Physical Chemistry from 1956 until his "retirement" in 1987, he taught classes, mentored graduate students, and led a highly productive research team. As Professor Emeritus, he continued conducting research and working with students for more than 30 years thereafter.

An internationally honored scientist, he was a Fellow of the American Physical Society, Royal Norwegian Council for Scientific and Industrial Research, American Association for the Advancement of Science, the Sloan Foundation, member of the Norwegian Academy, and Honorary Doctorate from the University of Trondheim, Norway, to name a few. Ken also received many prestigious awards in recognition of his accomplishments and contributions to OSU. This was capped in 2016 when Dr Hedberg received the inaugural OSU College of Science Lifetime Achievement in Science Award.

Ken valued his time with family and friends. Ken and Lise travelled widely, from working as visiting professors in Norway, England, and Australia, to vacation cruises on the rivers in Europe and through the Panama Canal.

Closer to home, Ken enjoyed sitting down to a meal with a fine glass of wine,

engaging in lively, far-reaching discussions from inverting the B-Matrix to where to cross country ski the following weekend. He played tennis throughout his life, from lettering on the OSU tennis team as an undergraduate, to being a founding member of the Timberhill racket club.

He was an active member of several social and community groups, including his Poker Group (meeting for 70+ years), his monthly discussion group, and the “old men’s lunch” (retirees from the chemistry department). He served for almost 40 years on the Good Samaritan Hospital’s Ethics committee.

Ken will be lovingly remembered by his family and friends as a man of extraordinary intelligence, kindness, wit, and joie de vivre who applied his mind and heart fully to what he called in his last days a “good, long life.” Ken said he had been given so much by the university that he wanted to give back to future generations. In 2005, he and Lise established the “Ken & Lise Hedberg Student Endowment Fund in Chemistry” at OSU.

Ken is survived by his wife, Lise; children, Erik and Katrina; and four grandchildren, Lindsey, Allison, Annika and Peter.

A celebration of Ken’s life will take place on what would have been his 99th birthday, February 2, 2019, at 2 p.m. at the OSU Foundation, 4238 SW Research Way, Corvallis, Oregon.

In lieu of flowers, the family asks that donations be sent to the Ken & Lise Hedberg Student Endowment Fund in Chemistry, OSU Foundation.

Previous Events

Celebration of Life

FEB 2. 2:00 PM (PT)

OSU Foundation
4238 SW Research Way
Corvallis, OR 97333

Tribute Wall

TC

“ Dear Hedberg family: I was sorry to see of Ken's passing and that brought up the many memories I have of of Ken and Lise over the many years. Especially I think back to all the tennis we shared, the after- tennis drinks and the inevitable discussion of current events. While we didn't often agree on some of these events, the discussions were always friendly and fun. The one subject we always agreed upon was the wonders of Norway and Ken and Lise were always a font of knowledge about that country. My thoughts and prayers are with you, the family, at this time. Ted Carlson

Ted Carlson - January 27, 2019 at 03:39 PM

RC

“ Dear Lise,

It's a singular honor for me to have had you and Ken as friends for the past 43 years. I grieve with you his loss, but, if anyone ever did, he "had a good run". I'm sorry Shep and I missed you and Katrina when we stopped by last week, but we had a most enjoyable chat with Erik while we waited.

Ken was always "larger than life" in so many ways. After such a full and successful life, it will be easy for him to always be larger than death.

Dick Clinton

Richard Clinton - January 14, 2019 at 04:18 PM

PW

“ Dear Lise and Family:

Sheila and I are so sorry to hear of Ken's passing and our thoughts are with you at this time. What a marvelous person Ken was and what an amazing life you shared! Ken was not only an outstanding scientist and colleague, but he was also a funny and kind person who was a delight to be with. I remember how helpful and generous he was to me when I was learning the ropes of life as an Assistant Professor. He was one of a kind.

Phil Watson

Phil Watson - January 13, 2019 at 04:58 PM