



Leonard Joseph Weber

September 7, 1927 - May 5, 2024

Leonard J. Weber, 1927-2024

Leonard Joseph Weber passed away on May 5th in his home in Corvallis, Oregon, at the age of 96. Len, as his family and friends called him, was a 4th generation Oregonian. He was an exceptionally kind, generous, and gentle man, with a ready wit and a brilliant smile. All of this showed in his deep devotion to his family, his electrical engineering students at Oregon State University, and his wide circle of friends and colleagues. Like so many engineers, he was a practical man, good at problem-solving. He loved making and repairing things, fulfilling tasks around the house, and tinkering in his shop. Finding “the right tool” became his mantra for whatever he wanted to accomplish. As his career and life demonstrated, he was always ready to help others – taking on committee work at OSU, volunteering for community or church efforts, or helping his wife and kids.

Len was born in Portland in 1927 to Victor and Ina Weber, their second son after his older brother James Gordon Weber (1921-2015). His boyhood enthusiasms included racing the streets of Mount Tabor on his Flexible Flyer, spending summers at the family’s cabin in Brightwood, Oregon, and playing with his friends and dog Rudy. A large clan of Webers, Whites (his mother’s maiden name) and other relatives would gather in Brownsville Oregon for reunions and family visits, and Len remembered his grandmother speaking German to him. Well into the 20th century, the Weber cabin had a calendar

advertising grandfather Fred Weber's Harness Shop, a Brownsville family business. Len was a musical boy and played the harmonica, clarinet, piano, flute, and piccolo. Climbing with a group from the Mazamas, he summited Mount Saint Helens as a 17-year-old, an achievement he spoke proudly of in his last years.

After graduating from Franklin High School in 1945, he enlisted in the US Navy and was stationed in the Bay Area on Treasure Island and in Monterey. He enlisted too late to see combat duty in the Second World War. His Navy training and teaching in electronics sparked the interests that would shape his career, and after his service ended in 1948 he enrolled in Oregon State College (now OSU) on the GI Bill as an electrical engineering major. In college he made lifelong friends in classes and his academic fraternity, Sigma Phi Epsilon. Most importantly, he played flute and piccolo and met the love of his life in the college orchestra – Barbara Burtner, another flute player and a Delta Gamma sorority member from Corvallis.

Len and Barbara were married Sept. 22, 1951. After he graduated in from OSC in 1952, they moved east so that he could take a job at Bell Labs in New Jersey. Although he had envisioned a teaching career, Len felt that real-world experience in industry should come first. At the time, Bell Labs was hiring the “best and brightest” recently graduated engineers from across the country, and as one of the top students in his OSC class, Len fit the bill. Barbara had lived her whole life in Corvallis and wanted to see the world; the young newlyweds drove east in their new Rambler in 1952. Two of their best friends from OSC also took positions at Bell around this time, giving them some continuity with their Oregon community. While Len began working, Barbara took classes at Montclair Teacher's College; and was able to finish her OSC degree in June 1953. Their daughter Sharon Lee Weber was born in Orange, New Jersey, in 1953. They enjoyed traveling to New York City, Lake George, and other sites in the East.. In 1954, OSC offered Len a teaching position on the Electrical Engineering faculty, and after deliberating with family for a week, he accepted. In 1955, a year after they returned to Corvallis, Len and

Barbara's son, John Steven Weber.

Len's OSU career stretched from 1954 until his retirement in December, 1990, with a one-year break in 1961-62 to do a Masters degree at the University of Washington. In 1958, while still an Assistant Professor, Len received the Loyd Carter Award for Outstanding and Inspirational Teaching, a student-selected honor given to only two OSU College of Science faculty annually. He subsequently received tenure in 1959, the Moser undergraduate teaching award in 1966, and promotion to full Professor in 1968. From 1970 to 1974, he directed the new, university-wide OSU Honors Program, and then became Assistant Department Head of Electrical and Computer Engineering. In 1987-88 he served as Assistant Dean of Engineering, and from 1988 until his retirement, as Associate Dean and Head Advisor.

Len considered himself primarily a teacher, not a researcher, but his book *Electrical Measurement Systems for Biological and Physical Scientists*, co-authored by Don McLean, was published by Addison Wesley in 1975. His fascination with the lives led by engineering students after college led to another book, *Transformation: Engineering Careers from University to Retirement*, self-published in 1982. This book drew on his interviews with engineers about the often unexpected and unpredictable courses of their careers. He conducted research and writing for that book during a 1980-81 sabbatical, spent on Whidbey Island in Washington and later in Nottingham, England, and Patras, Greece. During those travels he and Barbara also passed through Florence, Italy, where they bonded with their future daughter-in-law Leila over shared interests in art, landscape, and food, and also began another lasting friendship with her parents. An earlier sabbatical took the family east to Durham, New Hampshire, in 1969-70, with trips to explore the East Coast, and a summer trip to Switzerland, Germany, and the Netherlands. Travel and nature were always part of Len and Barbara's lives together. In addition to their extensive trips in Europe and the US, they enjoyed going to the Cabin, the rustic Weber family retreat in Brightwood, Oregon, built by

Len's father in the early 1930s and often shared with relatives and friends. There were also annual tent camping trips on Orcas Island and throughout Oregon when the kids were young. Len taught them to fish in mountain streams near the Cabin, and in Moran lake on Orcas Island in the San Juans, fishing from an eight-foot sailing dinghy that he built himself; it traveled with the family tied to the top of their VW bus. Standout travel after retirement included a bicycle trip in France with friends from Germany and England, and an Elderhostel in Venice.

Len always found time to support others in the family and community, both before and after retirement. He helped Barbara's work as an artist, matting and framing her woodblock prints for display at exhibitions around Corvallis, including her gallery Art of the Valley. He led a youth program called S.M.I.L.E (Science and Math Investigative Learning Experience); helped organize Corvallis Music Association concerts; and volunteered for the Benton County Historical Museum, where he photographed hundreds of objects for their collections database. Len and Barbara's generous donations also supported the construction of the new Corvallis Museum.

Throughout his life, Len was an ardent gardener, raising vegetables at his homes on Hillcrest Drive and Garfield in Corvallis, and working with Barbara on their amazing flower garden at the Garfield house, where Barbara's passion for daffodils arose. Trips throughout the US, the UK, and the Netherlands included visits to daffodil gardens and growers, and Len worked with Barbara on her exhibition entries for the Oregon and National Daffodil Societies, leading to many purple and blue ribbons. After their move to Stonybrook senior housing in 2007, Len and Barbara immediately created a new garden, where they raised approximately 200 varieties of daffodils that they continued to show.

Len was an avid cyclist long before it became common for commuting, riding his bike to his Dearborn Hall office beginning in the 1950s and 1960s. At the time, that was still considered slightly eccentric for a university professor. His love of cycling continued his whole life, as did his belief in regular exercise.

Len was baptized in the Presbyterian church in Portland and then joined Barbara as a lifelong, dedicated member of the Corvallis United Methodist Church. He sang in the choir, served on many committees, worked as a volunteer, and donated generously to help fund an addition to the church. He also wrote an account of its 150-year history.

Len is survived by his wife of 72 years, Barbara Burtner Weber, his daughter Sharon, his son John, and his daughter-in-law Leila, nephews Tom, Robert (Michele) niece Janet and great nephew Alexander, great nieces Lucy, Kathryn, Lauren, Rebecca and Elizabeth. The family thanks his caregivers from New Horizons, who helped him live at home his last two years. We miss him more than words can say, even as we celebrate his long, caring life, his gift for friendship, and essential goodness. He gave us all so much.

A memorial service will be held at the Corvallis First United Methodist Church on September 7, 2024, at 2pm. Friends wishing to recognize Leonard's life and work are encouraged to make donations to the First United Methodist Church, or the Benton County Historical Museum/Corvallis Museum in his honor.

Previous Events

Memorial Service

SEP 7. 2:00 PM (PT)

First United Methodist Church
1165 NW Monroe Ave
Corvallis, OR

Tribute Wall

DW

“ I recently thought of Mr. Weber, as he preferred to be called when he taught at OSU, and was sad to hear of his passing. He was the finest professor I ever had in any class at any university I have attended (I was a grad student at OSU in 1968-69). He made complex topics easy to understand. I went on to a 35 year career in electronics and software development, and even in retirement now I am continuing to explore the application of the Nyquist–Shannon sampling theorem to digital audio recording! My many thanks to Leonard for his inspiration.

Dennis Wilkins - Colorado

Dennis Wilkins - August 21, 2024 at 12:06 PM