IN MEMORIAM

In Appreciation
John Howard Richardson
1930-1998

The world biological safety community lost a quiet giant when John H. Richardson died February 10 at his home in Atlanta, Georgia. He had lung cancer.

Dr. John Richardson was a remarkable individual who made an enormous contribution to the field of biological safety. John had many fine qualities that formed the foundation for his full and distinguished career. Among these were a strong academic background in veterinary medicine and public health, an uncompromising belief in the goodwill of his colleagues, the value he placed on using his abilities in service to others, and a deep inner spirit that was nurtured by the love he shared with his family and friends, his colleagues, his church, and with nature.

John received his doctorate in veterinary medicine from the University of Georgia in 1954. He then joined the U.S. Public Health Service as a commissioned officer and was assigned to the Epidemiology Intelligence Service at the Communicable Disease Center, the predecessor organization of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). His career path included service in the state health departments of Delaware, Kansas and Georgia, and a stint at the Tulane University School of Public Health where he was awarded the M.P.H. degree in 1963. After an assignment with the CDC foreign quarantine program, John joined the CDC Office of Biosafety in 1970 and served as its director from 1975 until his retirement from the Public Health Service in 1984. For many years he was a consultant with the World Health Organization and directed the WHO Collaborating Centre for Applied Biosafety Programmes and Research at CDC. In 1985, John began a career in academia at Emory University where he was appointed as an associate professor in environmental health. He became the director of the University’s Environmental Health and Safety Office in 1989 and served in that capacity until 1992 when he chose to conclude his formal professional career.

Everyone who knew John respected his intelligence, enjoyed his keen wit, benefited from the openness with which he shared his knowledge, admired his capacity to work, was reassured by his calm demeanor, and trusted his impeccable judgment. John possessed the uncanny ability to distill the simple truths from the complexities of life’s experiences. He used this special talent to bring about a new code of practice for safeguarding the health of laboratory personnel who work with infectious agents.

John conceived the idea for an authoritative code of biosafety practice and lead the CDC-NIH collaboration that resulted in the 1984 publication of Biosafety in Microbiological and Biomedical Laboratories. With persistence and determination over a seven year period, he forged a common bond among disparate groups of biomedical scientists and clinical microbiologists that made consensus possible. The enormity of this achievement can best be appreciated by reviewing the names of the guest editors, panel chairmen, and special contributors listed in the first edition of the Guidelines.

John also made significant contributions to the American Biological Safety Association. He served as president in 1987-1988, delivered the Arnold G. Wedum Memorial Lecture at the 32nd Biological Safety Conference in New Orleans, Louisiana, and worked on numerous committees. He believed in the ideals of professionalism and was extraordinarily helpful in establishing the certification program of the American Academy of Microbiology for biological safety professionals.

John will be missed and always remembered for his contributions to the field of biological safety and for the joy he brought to the hearts of everyone he touched.

W. Emmett Barkley