

1-13-2014

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Lawrence University

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Recommended Citation

Lawrence University, "Lawrence Mourns the Death of Professor Emeritus of Chemistry Cliffe Joel" (2014). *Press Releases*. Paper 148.
<http://lux.lawrence.edu/pressreleases/148>

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Lawrence Mourns the Death of Professor Emeritus of Chemistry Cliffe Joel

Posted on: January 13th, 2014 by Rick Peterson

Professor Emeritus of Chemistry Cliffe Joel died Thursday, Jan. 9 in Williston, Vt. He was 81.



Professor Emeritus of Chemistry Cliffe Joel

Cliffe joined the Lawrence faculty in 1968 and taught the full array of chemistry courses, including his personal favorite, “Chemistry of Your Brain,” until his retirement in 1997. During his 29-year tenure in the chemistry department, Cliffe played a leading role in creating innovative curriculum for Lawrence’s involvement with the ChemLinks Coalition.

He served as president of the Midwest Collegiate Athletic Conference in the late 1970s and chaired the committee that revised Lawrence’s honor code in the 1980s. He spent 10 years serving as one of the college’s original “faculty associates,” eating meals with students in the residence halls and setting up review sessions.

Upon his retirement, Cliffe said working closely with individual students, especially those with either an academic or personal problem, was the most meaningful aspect of his career. “I’ve always tried to be a good listener, help them get things off their chest, put things in perspective and steer them toward a solution,” he remarked at the time.

Born in in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, Canada, in 1932, Cliffe spent much of his youth in Vista, Calif., where his family owned an avocado farm. He graduated from Pomona College and went on to earn a Ph.D. in biological chemistry from Harvard University. He spent seven years conducting research at Harvard Medical School, focusing on the role of polyunsaturated fatty acids in the brain, which was related to the current omega-3 fatty acid trend, before joining the Lawrence faculty.

Cliffe spent much of his retirement living in Oceanside, Calif., near where he’d grown up. He volunteered in the Stephen Ministry Program and taught NAMI classes before moving to Vermont in 2010 to be closer to his children and grandchildren. Classical music and singing were among his passions and he demonstrated his love for nature through camping, hiking, traveling and gardening. He ran marathons and in his later years was known for his long walks with his walker affixed with two vases he filled with flowers he picked along the way.

He is survived by his wife, Emma, and her son, Daniel Cullinan and daughters Lisa Cullinan and Deborah Cullinan and husband Kevin Cunz; two daughters, Dr. Lisa Angstman and husband Paul Angstman, and Sara Joel and husband Dr. Ashesh Mehta; son, Eric Joel; 13 grandchildren; and his former wife and friend, Dr. Peteranne Joel and her partner, Don Manley.