



Heinz B. Biesdorf

July 1, 1924 – December 18, 2014

Dr. Heinz B. Biesdorf, Professor of Consumer Economics for 25 years in the College of Human Ecology, Cornell University is survived by his wife Ellen, relatives in Germany, and many friends.

Born in 1924 to Emilie and Alfred Biesdorf in Stuttgart, Germany, Professor Biesdorf emigrated to the United States in 1950. Following a short stay with his sponsor in rural Pennsylvania, he accepted employment at the H. J. Heinz Company and later as a night laboratory technician at St. John's Hospital in Pittsburgh.

Professor Biesdorf earned a Business Administration degree from the University of Pittsburgh in 1955, the year he became a citizen of the United States.

Returning to Europe, Professor Biesdorf received a Ph.D. in Economics and Finance at the Leopold Francisca University in Innsbruck, Austria, and spent several years in marketing, and teaching economics at U.S. Army bases.

Professor Biesdorf returned to the United States to accept a professorship at the University of Pittsburgh and then at Cornell University in 1964, the year he and Ellen were married.

At Cornell, Professor Biesdorf launched mass media messages on money management through the Cornell Cooperative Extension system. Radio, television, newspapers, and magazines were utilized, as well as workshops and personal appearances throughout New York State. Educational Guides for schools and the general public accompanied these communication techniques.

Under the titles of Timeless Topics, Change for your Dollar, and Be a Better Shopper: Buying in Supermarkets, he and collaborating colleagues helped develop and disseminate the key consumer education messages. According to one interviewer, Professor Biesdorf became a household name for consumers with his timely emphasis on better money management.

He appeared on several national television programs and more than 200 different radio stations as well as daily broadcasts to Ithaca residents. One national newspaper called his efforts “a classroom for the millions.” His focus on supermarkets highlighted the major places where people were doing their food shopping, checking prices, and developing smart buying practices.

During Professor Biesdorf’s sabbatical leaves he taught at the Justus Liebig University in Giessen, Germany. He also gave lectures at several German and Austrian Universities and Swiss educational institutions, as well as talks and interviews for radio, television, newspapers, and magazines about consumer issues, money management and the history of the Cornell Cooperative Extension in the U.S.

Professor Biesdorf retired in the fall of 1989 as a Professor Emeritus. Much of Heinz and Ellen’s time in retirement was spent in Ithaca and cruising on small ships around the world.

Ellen recently offered the following statement that expresses her own evaluation of her husband’s life and captures Professor Biesdorf’s philosophy and endeavors as an educator: “Leave footprints of knowledge in the path of your life for others to follow in perpetuity.”

Professor Biesdorf created an outline of his own life story from which an obituary was created and published in the “Ithaca Journal.” This version is used with permission and assistance from Mrs. Ellen Biesdorf, and assistance from Bettie Lee Yerka and Martha Mapes.