

Richard N. White



December 21, 1933 — October 3, 2009

Richard “Dick” N. White, the James A. Friend Family Distinguished Professor of Engineering Emeritus of the School of Civil and Environmental Engineering (CEE), died at the age of 75. He was born in Chetek, Wisconsin and grew up on several different dairy farms in Wisconsin. His father alternated farm ownership with operation of a small contracting firm. Work on the farms, helping his father in construction, and his classroom interests made civil engineering his clear choice while still in high school.

Dick pursued his civil engineering education at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, earning a B.S. in 1956 and an M.S. in 1957. He and his wife, Margaret “Marge” C. Howell, met while they were undergraduates and were married in December 1957. After 6-months of active duty in the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, he returned to Madison to work as a structural designer for a firm of consulting engineers. He continued this work part time when he re-enrolled at UW-Madison for study leading to his Ph.D. in structures, awarded in 1961. While still a graduate student, he began to develop his famously effective teaching skills by serving as an Instructor with full responsibility for several undergraduate courses.

He joined the CEE faculty in 1961 and rapidly developed a versatile research program to complement his teaching of undergraduate and graduate courses. Although his research interests spanned all the traditional areas of structural engineering – experimental, analytical and computer approaches to concrete, steel and timber structures – he held a special love for topics in concrete and for structural model studies. In support of the last, he led the creation and use of a structural models lab for both instruction and research that was one of the finest in the nation. Among his many publications, he was the senior author (with faculty colleagues Peter Gergely and Robert Sexsmith) of a remarkably successful set of textbooks, *Structural Engineering*, a three-volume series that integrated aspects of mechanics, analysis, behavior, materials and design – and also disseminated widely the essence of the Cornell CEE undergraduate curriculum in structures.

Among his numerous appointments and positions at Cornell, he most notably served as Director of the School of Civil and Environmental Engineering (1978-84). Among his proudest accomplishments as Director was the fundraising, planning, construction and dedication for a 5,000-sq.ft. addition to Hollister Hall to house the Joseph H. DeFrees Hydraulics Laboratory. He served the College as Associate Dean for Undergraduate Programs (1987-90), and he was named the James A. Friend Family Distinguished Professor of Engineering in 1988. Dick retired

from Cornell in 1999 but remained active in the School until illness overtook him in 2005. Thanks to the financial support of alumni and friends, the Richard N. White Instructional Laboratory was dedicated in 2004 within the newly refurbished Bovay Laboratory Complex of CEE. Posthumously, a fund drive has been launched to endow the continued maintenance and upgrading of this lab as well as the other instructional labs in the School of CEE.

Throughout his 39 years at Cornell, Dick also maintained a part-time consulting practice for dozens of clients, including leading companies, national laboratories, government agencies, publishers and universities. This consulting involved structural analysis, design and development work; structural investigations, reviews and evaluations; structural research and development oversight; preparation of design aids; and editorial development work.

During the course of his career, he received two teaching awards from Cornell's College of Engineering (1965 and 1996), three "Professor of the Year" honors from the Cornell chapter of the civil engineering honorary society Chi Epsilon (1972, 1987 and 1996), the University of Wisconsin Distinguished Service Citation (1993), and the Collingwood Prize of the American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE) in 1967. He was elected to the National Academy of Engineers in 1992 and was also named an Honorary Member of the ASCE in 2001.

An American Concrete Institute (ACI) member since the late 1950s, Dick was elected ACI Vice President in 1995, served as ACI President from 1997 to 1998, and was Chair of the Standards Board from 2002 to 2005. He was a member of the Technical Activities Committee for 8 years and served as its Chair from 1991 to 1994. He also served a 3-year term on the ACI Board of Direction. White was a member of numerous ACI committees; and he was the first Chair of ACI Committees 335: Composite and Hybrid Structures, and 444: Experimental Analysis for Concrete Structures. White received the ACI Joe W. Kelly Award in 1992 and was the co-recipient of the ACI Wason Medal for Most Meritorious Paper and the ACI Structural Research Award in 1993 and 1994, respectively. He was named an ACI Fellow in 1974 and was elevated to ACI Honorary Membership in 2006.

During his sabbatical leaves from Cornell, he was a staff associate at Gulf General Atomic (1967-1968) and a visiting professor at the University of California at Berkeley (1974-75), the University of Puerto Rico at Mayaguez (1982), Southwestern Jiaotong University in China (1982), and Durham University in England (1990).

Through his mentoring of many international graduate students and his duties as ACI President, he was able to enjoy travel to a great many places in the world: Egypt, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Puerto Rico, Costa Rica, Colombia, Chile and Brazil, to name a few. He also lectured in many places, including an

extended stint in China in the early 1980s that included Beijing, Hong Kong, Shanghai, Wuhan, Xian, and Chendu. Of course, he always carried his favorite camera, recording his trips, the scenery, the people, the foods, and life wherever he was.

Photography was a major pastime for Dick. He enjoyed taking pictures of people, birds, animals, flowers, and all the things around him. He later entered many photographic exhibitions, and had numerous one-man shows of his various works, both locally in Ithaca and a major show in eastern Massachusetts. He also recorded the growing years of his daughter, Barbara, and son, David.

Dick was very proud of his years at Cornell University and of the colleagues and students who were an integral part of his career and life. He enjoyed his many friends and neighbors through his Ithaca years, as well as his beloved schnauzers. He is survived by his wife, Marge, one daughter and one son and their spouses, a sister, and several grandchildren, nieces and nephews.

Dick's personal and professional accomplishments were outstanding as shown, in part, by the array of distinguished awards and recognitions that were presented to him throughout his career. But in addition, we would be remiss if we did not acknowledge the statesmanlike and humane role he performed as a distinguished member of the Cornell University Faculty – a role that infused and yet transcended his specific area of research and which demonstrated his personal warmth, knowledge, compassion and commitment to students, staff and faculty in Civil and Environmental Engineering and in every aspect of the University in which he participated. Dick was uniformly admired and respected and will be long remembered for the many roles he fulfilled as a Cornell faculty member.

John Abel, Chair; Kenneth Hover, Walter Lynn, William McGuire, Arnim Meyburg