MEMORIAL RESOLUTION OF THE FACULTY OF THE UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

ON THE DEATH OF PROFESSOR EMERITUS HUGH T. RICHARDS

Professor Emeritus Hugh T. Richards died on September 29, 2006 at the age of 87. Hugh was a faculty member in the Department of Physics from 1947 until his retirement in 1988. He has been described as "an outstanding professor but also a warm, generous individual of remarkably good judgment and unimpeachable integrity." He is survived by his wife Mildred, six children, nine grandchildren, and one great-grandson.

Hugh Richards was born on November 7, 1918 on a homestead in Baca County, Colorado. He graduated from Platteville (Wisconsin) High School, received his B.A. from Park College, and earned his Ph.D. in nuclear physics from Rice Institute (now Rice University) in 1942. His Ph.D. research on the detection of neutrons made him valuable to the Manhattan Project. He spent the war years at Los Alamos, where he met his wife, and shortly thereafter came to Madison to begin a long and distinguished career in teaching, research and university service.

Hugh started his career at Wisconsin as a research associate, was appointed as an assistant professor in 1947, and promoted to full professor in 1952. He served as chair of the Department of Physics from 1960-63, and then as associate dean of the College of Letters and Science from 1963-66. In 1966 he accepted a second three-year term as department chair in physics. In 1985 the Department of Physics again drafted him to be chair, a position he held until his retirement. Hugh was also chair of the Physical Sciences Divisional Executive Committee from 1958 through 1961 and served on a large number of ad hoc university committees and national science panels. His terms as department chair spanned a time of great change in the Department of Physics, as the number of graduate students and faculty grew markedly, and the research mission expanded.

Hugh conducted an active research program in nuclear physics from the start of his career at Wisconsin until his retirement. During this 42-year span, he directed the research of 49 Ph.D. students and a score of postdoctoral fellows from the U.S. and abroad. In his early work, he developed methods to determine nuclear reaction energies to a new level of accuracy. The main thrust of his research was to carry out precision measurements designed to study and classify the energy levels of light nuclei. Of special note are the experiments he and his students carried out on nuclear reaction processes that require violation of isospin conservation. Hugh and his group also made important contributions to the area of ion source development, inventing a source capable of producing beams of a wide variety of chemical elements. Sources of the Richards Design are now commonly used at accelerator mass spectroscopy facilities around the world.

Hugh was one of those rare individuals who enjoyed and excelled in research and teaching in equal parts. He treated students and colleagues with warmth and respect. He and Mildred welcomed students to their large home, even offering temporary housing to postdoctoral fellows who arrived from abroad. Hugh was always modest about his own accomplishments. Although he invariably contributed greatly to the successful outcome of his student's research projects, he would frequently decline to have his name listed as a coauthor on the resulting journal publications. Hugh enjoyed teaching the physics 207/208 introductory sequence. He was a master at finding simple classroom demonstrations that would illustrate the subject he was discussing, and made sure that the students could see and understand his demonstrations. The following excerpts from a letter written by a former student illustrates the impact of his teaching: "If you reflect upon your accomplishments as a physicist, I urge you to count foremost among them what you have done teaching elementary physics." After commenting on the difference between

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educating and training, the student goes on to say, “You have educated, you have shared your sense of wonder, and shared your enjoyment of physics. What you have accomplished is not merely by virtue of intelligence and deeds, but by virtue of your personality and what you are.” Hugh will be remembered as a man of wisdom and generosity, a respected colleague skilled at both research and teaching, and a devoted family man.

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