

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

ON THE DEATH OF PROFESSOR PETER J. BOSSCHER

Peter J. Bosscher, professor of civil and environmental engineering and of geological engineering, passed away Sunday morning, November 18, 2007, in his home, surrounded by his family after a brief struggle with cancer.

Peter was born November 25, 1953, in Grand Rapids, Michigan. He grew up in a family that was committed to helping others. The family performed a variety of service projects, which included smashing bottles for the first recycling program in Grand Rapids, building a summer camp in rural western Michigan for inner-city youth, and hosting international students attending Calvin College.

Peter became a Calvin College student in 1971. He spent the summer of 1975 in Fort Chaffee, Arkansas, teaching English to Vietnamese refugees, several of whom became life-long friends. He went on to the University of Michigan where he received his Ph.D. in civil engineering in 1981. His thesis focused on soil arching theory and stabilization of slopes with trees and other vertical objects. At Michigan he also developed expertise in soil dynamics and ground vibrations, and he applied this expertise to numerous projects in the region. After receiving his Ph.D., he was hired in the Geo Engineering Group in the Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, where he taught soil mechanics, foundations, retaining structures, soil dynamics, civil engineering materials, and other courses. Towards the end of his career, he developed courses on engineering sustainability and engineering ethics, pioneering the rising interest in these topics well ahead of changing times in engineering education. He was among the founding faculty of the interdisciplinary Geological Engineering Degree Program in the early 1990s and a strong supporter of the program thereafter. He also was a committed lecturer for continuing education and served as an instructor in numerous short courses offered by the Department of Engineering Professional Development over the years, most notably in foundations and slope stability courses.

Peter was particularly skilled in electronic instrumentation and computers. He led the department in the early 1980s as personal computers started to become available. He assisted many faculty, staff, and students in developing their skills in the use of personal computers and numerical computations. His skills in instrumentation and electronic control of experiments and data collection sustained the Geo Engineering Group and others in the department. These skills, combined with his extraordinarily giving personality, made him an indispensable colleague to many faculty members and a great mentor to many students.

While his professional expertise was in geotechnical engineering and civil engineering materials, Peter's career was defined by a passion for helping people and a willingness to speak out against injustices he perceived. In 2002, in response to the desperate need of the Muramba Parish of Rwanda, Peter initiated a chapter of Engineers Without Borders (EWB) at UW-Madison. Under his leadership, EWB-UWM flourished and quickly grew to include over 100 student members. Peter derived great joy in seeing engineering students, including his son Nate, transformed as they used their skills and energy to make a difference in Ecuador, Costa Rica, Thailand and particularly the community of Muramba, Rwanda. In addition to the benefits he made possible for the people of Rwanda, Peter enabled UW-Madison students to participate in a cross-cultural dialogue and provided a sense of direction for many members. Peter was awarded the 2005 Ragnar E. Onstad Service to Society Award by the College of Engineering for efforts such as these.

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In 1977, Peter married Marcia Vermaire, and he was a proud father of Nathan, Anne, Georgia, and Toney. Peter loved watching their Ultimate Frisbee games and was an enthusiastic coach from the sidelines. He took great joy in music, whether listening, playing, or singing. He was an active member of Geneva Campus Church, where his counsel, good humor, and wisdom blessed the congregation. His influence is cherished by the students and others he mentored, for whom he modeled care and hospitality. Above all, he was an individual who transcended cultural and technical barriers and shined his humanity and care on all with whom he came into contact.

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