Memorial Resolution of the Faculty of the University of Wisconsin-Madison
On the Death of Professor Emeritus Roswell K. Boutwell

Dr. Roswell “Roz” Knight Boutwell, Professor Emeritus of Oncology, passed away peacefully on Friday, August 25, 2017, just three months shy of his 100th birthday. For over 70 years Roz was an enthusiastic and loyal supporter of cancer research, the McArdle Laboratory for Cancer Research, and the University of Wisconsin. Along with his early faculty colleagues—Harold P. Rusch, Van R. Potter, James and Betty Miller, Gerald C. Mueller, and Charles Heidelberger—Roz helped to establish the international reputation of the McArdle Laboratory and to build the strong foundation of basic cancer research on the University of Wisconsin-Madison campus.

Roz was born on Nov. 24, 1917, in Madison, the son of Professor Paul and Clara (Brinkoff) Boutwell. They instilled in Roz the value of education and hard work, the importance of family, and a love for the outdoors. Roz received a B.S. (1939) in Chemistry at Beloit College, his M.S. (1941) in Biochemistry from the University of Wisconsin-Madison, and Ph.D. in Biochemistry from the University of Wisconsin-Madison in 1944. In his early work as a graduate student, Roz worked with Conrad Elvehjem and E.B. Hart on studies on the nutritive value of fats and oils.

In July 1943 Roz’ life was forever changed when he met Luella Mae (Lou) Fairchild, a dietician working at Wisconsin General Hospital (UW Hospital). Their first date was a canoe trip across University Bay to Picnic Point. Although the courtship was short (they married on Sept. 25, 1943), the relationship was long. Roz remained devoted to Lou throughout their 72 years of marriage until her death in 2015.

After graduation Dr. Boutwell accepted a position as an instructor in Oncology (1945) at the McArdle Memorial Laboratory, and he soon became interested in chronic caloric restriction and the stimulating effect of dietary fat on carcinogenesis. He illuminated the role of high-fat diets in the development of cancer, especially breast cancer, and was one of the first to propose that vitamin A plays a role in preventing cancer. Clinical trials have since demonstrated that high doses of a vitamin A derivative, Accutane, prevent lung, throat, and mouth cancer.

In 1949 Dr. Boutwell joined the faculty at the McArdle Laboratory for Cancer Research as an Assistant Professor. Roz and his faculty colleagues soon earned an international reputation for their ground-breaking studies on chemical carcinogenesis.

Dr. Boutwell was an outstanding mentor, teacher, researcher, and colleague. He was the first to define the initiation, promotion and progression steps in carcinogenesis. His pioneering research focused on defining the mechanisms of carcinogenesis as a step toward the rational design of agents for cancer prevention and treatment. Dr. Boutwell was the first to identify ornithine decarboxylase and prostaglandins as potential molecular cancer targets. These findings led to the synthesis of their inhibitors (DFMO, Sulindac) which have shown efficacy in prevention of colorectal cancer. Dr. Boutwell was the first to coin the term ‘combination chemoprevention’. Dr. Boutwell published over 180 scientific papers detailing his research. Dr. Boutwell’s fundamental contributions on the biology of skin carcinogenesis have provided the paradigm that drives much of modern cancer research in this area. Dr. Boutwell may be considered the modern-day father of multistage carcinogenesis research, since many other key investigators in the field were students under his direction. He was a beloved mentor and kind friend to numerous graduate students and postdoctoral trainees, with many attending a 2008 Symposium honoring Dr. Boutwell and his work.

Dr. Boutwell also had a significant impact on cancer policy in this country, participating on numerous study sections, advisory committees, and editorial and review boards throughout his career. He served as Associate Editor of the journals Cancer Research (1973 to 1981) and Nutrition and Cancer, as a member of the Board of Directors for the American Association for Cancer Research from 1979 to 1982, and the Scientific Advisory Board for the Coordinating Council for Cancer Research from 1989 to 1992, and as a
consultant to the Food and Drug Administration and Environmental Protection Agency. He was appointed by President Ronald Reagan to the National Cancer Advisory Board from 1984-1990. In addition, he served on countless departmental, Medical School, and University committees. He was instrumental in the planning of the second Mc Ardle Laboratory building, which opened in 1964, insuring that it provided an outstanding environment for collaboration and state-of-the-art research. Professor Boutwell received numerous honors for his work, including the prestigious G.H.A. Clowes Lecturer Award from the American Association for Cancer Research, the Founder’s Award for the Chemical Industry Institute for Toxicology, the Kenneth P. DuBois Award from the Society of Toxicology, and the Medal of Honor from the American Cancer Society. Toward the end of his professional research career, Dr. Boutwell went to Hiroshima, Japan to become the Chief of Research at the Radiation Effects Research Foundation from 1984-1986. He found the thought of retirement from research difficult and thought that this move would ease his transition. Dr. Boutwell became Professor Emeritus of Oncology at the McArdle Laboratory for Cancer Research in 1988 but continued to be a valued colleague for many years.

Roz and his wife Lou acquired their first home on Lake Monona in 1954 and later lived in Shorewood Hills. Roz was on the Monona Grove School Board while the Monona Grove high school was designed and built. At home, Roz was often found absorbed in reading his favorite newspapers, magazines, and journals while listening to the radio. He greatly enjoyed watching Badger football and basketball games. In 1959 he acquired “the farm” where he enjoyed being outdoors working hard on his sod farm business with his family and neighbors. Lou and Roz traveled extensively and made friends everywhere.

Roz is survived by three sons, Paul (Berdell Nielsen) of Mazomanie, WI, Philip of Janesville, WI, and David of Madison, WI; two granddaughters, Anna Haskell (Jon Haskell) and Sarah Boutwell (Luke Schraufnagel); and three great-grandchildren.

At the age of 99, Roz was thankful for his long and accomplished life and career and grateful for the time he had with Lou, his sons and their families, and the many friends he made along the way. Roz’ booming voice in the hallways of McArdle, recognizable by generations of McArdlites, will be forever missed.

Memorial Resolution Committee
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