Okun remembered for pioneering work in water engineering

Dr. Daniel A. Okun, UNC Kenan Distinguished University Professor Emeritus of environmental engineering, died Dec. 10, 2007, in Chapel Hill, N.C. He was 90.

Okun was hailed worldwide for his groundbreaking work in identifying pristine water sources, water management, water supply, pollution control, water reclamation and reuse, and watershed protection issues.

In 2006, he received lifetime achievement awards from Orange Water and Sewer Authority (OWASA) in Orange County, N.C., the national Environmental and Water Resources Institute and the International Water Association.

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During his career, Okun worked in 89 countries and consulted with municipal and legislative planning committees throughout the United States. Among Okun’s many contributions, he helped design a water treatment plant in Bangkok, Thailand; establish a graduate program in sanitary engineering in Lima, Peru; and studied water supply and pollution control in China for the World Bank. At home in Chapel Hill, he led the campaign to build Cane Creek Dam and Reservoir in the 1980s to ensure the most pristine water source possible for Chapel Hill and UNC campus.

Okun began his career at UNC in 1952 and served as chair of the Department of Environmental Sciences and Engineering from 1955 to 1973. During his time as chair, the department grew from three to 25 faculty members. Although Okun retired from teaching in 1982, he remained actively involved in the profession through writing, lecturing and consulting, until his death.

“Dan Okun cared deeply about his school, his community, his state and his world,” says Dean Barbara K. Rimer. “And he turned that commitment into action, through water projects and social action. Few professors have influenced more students, more professionals, or more policy decisions around the world than Dr. Okun. His work has influenced international policy-making for organizations like the World Bank, United Nations and the World Health Organization. There is nowhere I go that people don’t talk about Dan with awe.”

Okun was also a generous donor to the UNC School of Public Health. Over the course of his career, he gave generously to the School’s Department of Environmental Sciences and Engineering, including funds to create the Dan Okun Scholarship Fund. This endowed scholarship is used to recruit and support promising master’s level environmental engineering students. In 2004, he also made donations to augment the Daniel A. Okun Distinguished Professorship in environmental sciences and engineering — an endowed professorship held by Dr. Philip C. Singer and established in 1999 by School faculty, students and alumni to honor Okun. Finally, in 2007, Okun made a gift to name the chair’s suite in the School’s Department of Environmental Sciences and Engineering.

Okun’s gifts to UNC were not limited to the School of Public Health. He also made significant gifts for the renovation of Memorial Hall and to the Sonja Haynes Stone Center for Black Culture and History.

Donations may be made in Okun’s memory to the Dan Okun Scholarship Fund. Please make checks out to “UNC-Chapel Hill School of Public Health Foundation,” and write “Dan Okun Scholarship Fund” in the memo field. Mail gifts to UNC School of Public Health, P.O. Box 309, Chapel Hill, N.C. 27514-0309. You may give online at www.sph.unc.edu/giving. For more information, contact Lyne Gamble at (919) 966-8368 or lyne_gamble@unc.edu.

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Michaelak commemorated for selfless service to public health

Craig L. Michaelak, administrator of the North Carolina Local Health Agency Accreditation Program managed by the North Carolina Institute for Public Health (NCIPH) within the UNC School of Public Health, died on Aug. 20, 2007, after a valiant fight with leukemia. He was 59.

Michaelak came to UNC in 2005, along with his wife, Sarah, a university librarian and associate provost for university libraries at UNC-Chapel Hill. With an MBA from the University of California at Los Angeles, administrative experience at the University of Utah and the University of California system, and several years in business, Michaelak was a perfect fit to establish and administer the state’s first-ever local health agency accreditation program.

“Craig was a dear friend and a valued colleague,” says Dr. Edward Baker, NCIPH director. “So many of us benefited from his selfless service to public health in North Carolina and across the nation. Craig creatively built and managed the North Carolina Local Health Agency Accreditation Program, the first such program in the United States. The program he helped build will serve as a lasting legacy to his dedicated service, and it will stand as a model for others across the nation to emulate.”

Donations may be made in Michaelak’s memory to a fund established in his honor by UNC Libraries. Please make checks out to “University Library” and write “Craig Michaelak Memorial Library Fund” in the memo field. Mail gifts to the Library Development Office, CB #3900, UNC-Chapel Hill, Chapel Hill, N.C. 27514-8890. For more information, contact Sarah Potette at (919) 843-5660 or potette@email.unc.edu.

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Dr. At Tyroler, in a photo taken circa 1967.

Dr. Michaelak.

Dr. Daniel Okun, in a photo taken circa 1960s.

Features & News

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