

Tribute to Dr. John Kunesh

A. Shariat

Fractionation Research, Inc., P.O. Box 2108, Stillwater, OK 74076 USA

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Continuing the Heritage:

John Kunesh

Mich Sakata

Frits Zuiderweg

Memorial Symposium

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Tribute to John Kunesh:

The year 2006 was a year full of sorrow for the FRI_(sm) employees and those associated with FRI. On July 23, 2006 we lost Professor Fritz Zuiderweg, a long time consultant and associate of FRI. Six days later Dr. John Kunesh, who was the FRI Technical director for 18 years, and his wife Mrs. Denise Kunesh were killed in a terrible car accident in New Mexico. On September 20, 2006, we lost Mich Sakata who was with FRI for over 25 years. The last but not least we lost Bill Bolles a long fixture in FRI, especially on the FRI Technical Committee, on December 17 in St. Louis Missouri. On behalf of the FRI staff and its membership I'd like to thank AIChE and specially Henry Kister for recognizing the contributions that every one these associates of FRI have made to chemical engineering profession in general and distillation in particular by holding this memorial symposium.

I am sure many of you, working in distillation, knew John Kunesh in person, or had come across his work in the AIChE Separations Division when he was the Director from 2000 through 2001, 2nd Vice-Chair in 2002, 1st Vice-Chair in 2003, and Chair in 2004. For those who are not familiar with him, I have few comments to make, for the sake of time, I will make it as brief as possible.

John attended Carnegie Institute of Technology, where he received his BS (1959) and MS (1961) in Chemical Engineering. He joined the Process Engineering Department of UOP at its headquarters in Des Plaines, Illinois and worked there for seven years. His main focus during this time was on the design of a wide variety of petrochemical and refining processes. While at UOP, John designed the first two commercial UOP biodegradable detergent alkylation units. In 1967 he returned to school and obtained his Ph.D. in chemical engineering from Carnegie-Mellon University in 1971.

He returned to UOP and served as a Group Manager in UOP's Engineering Department. His responsibilities included training and evaluation of engineers working in his department. He also served as the fractionation Process Design Coordinator and was UOP's expert in distillation column design. John also managed the basic engineering for a grass roots refinery in Esmeraldas, Ecuador where he participated in planning and running the first licensee training course in basic design engineering. I had heard quite a few stories related to his experience during this project.

John joined Hydrocarbon Research, Inc. ("HRI") in 1976 and became the company's Vice President. He was the last technical manager of the H-Coal pilot plant in Catlettsburg, KY, this was a major DOE synfuels project. At HRI, John oversaw initiation of a major experimental facility expansion including permits, building design, experimental facility design and procurement. The expansion project prepared him for a bigger project which was moving the FRI facilities and the experimental unit from Alhambra California to Stillwater, Oklahoma.

In 1984 John joined FRI as the Technical Director, being responsible for all aspects of operations, and worked till his retirement in 2002. In 1989 to 1991 he

coordinated, the relocation and rebuilding of the experimental unit, and hiring the entire technical staff and unit operators.

John was so dedicated to AIChE that he attended a meeting in Austin, Texas in November 2004, just three weeks after a fall at home left him with a fractured right femur that required surgery. But nonetheless, he was there with a wheelchair, his wife at the helm and a big smile on his face.

Following his retirement in 2002, John began working as a part time consultant for the Department of Energy and few private companies. He was planning to teach calculus at the University of New Mexico in the Fall of 2006. He was very excited about teaching math, one of his great loves, and spent a good part of his time preparing the course material and getting acquainted with his future. Unfortunately, his dream did not materialize and his and his wife's lives were cut short on July 29, 2006 due to an auto accident

John was a great friend, mentor and teacher. He was very interested in all aspects of Chemical Engineering and work was one of his great loves. His other loves were his wife, Denise, their Children, Grand-Children and their many animals and many friends. John had a big heart and was always willing to lend a hand whether it was needed for intellectual or physical labor. He was very active and loved cycling, cross country skiing and hiking. John was totally dedicated to his work but was equally devoted to his family.

This tribute would not be complete without including the quotations by those who knew John professionally, as well as colleagues and friends:

- I will never forget John's support and encouragement when we were in the early stages of forming the Separations Division at an AIChE meeting in San Francisco. As a major contributor in distillation, John had always been a real asset to the Separations Division. *(Jimmy Humphrey, Ph.D., Past Chair and Co-Founder AIChE Separations Division)*
- John was a "gentleman" in the best English sense of the word. He was enthusiastic, knowledgeable about his work, full of anecdotes (sometimes too full) and fun to be with. During his long tenure as Technical Director of FRI, he handled the very difficult conflicting demands of the job with great skill and diplomacy. John had a combination of people skills and technical knowledge that is rarely encountered. I spent a lot of time with him over the years and usually sought out his company. I miss him still. *(Mike Lockett)*
- John and Denise were our friends. We'll miss them. They were good people. *(Neil and Loretta Yeoman)*
- We have met and found John as a wise, credible, knowledgeable, and independent person. We will continue our way of life, always remembering John and all of his contributions during his life time not only to the FRI membership, but to the distillation field in general. *(Dr. Michael Schultes on behalf of European members of FRI)*

- John was a great engineer with incredible drive, memory and tolerance for criticism. He had a love of life, travel and story telling. He was a good friend and is greatly missed.
(Paul Steacy, Chairman of FRI Technical & Technical Advisory Committees, UOP)
- I always enjoyed talking with John. He was always up-beat and positive. Even when we were riding in a rented car in Houston and a beer bottle smashed our windshield he had some positive things to say about the fright we had. After he retired from FRI, we worked on a consulting job together and I looked forward to discussing the project with him and hearing about the mountains and how he loved the location of his new house. I know we all will continue to miss him but he is still with us in the body of work he left behind and in our memories.
(Frank Rukovena, Jr., President, Fractionation Research, Inc.)
- This is very sad indeed. Dr. Kunesh and his wife were at the merit review we recently held in Golden, Colorado, where he consulted for me in the reviewing of FY06 proposals. What a nice couple and what a loss.
(Dickson Ozokwelu, Ph.D., PE, Lead Technology Manager, U.S. Department of Energy)
- I had once the pleasure of being the host with my wife to Denise and John on one occasion when they visited Delft. I had also a pleasure of being a co-author of a paper with both Frits Zuiderweg and John Kunesh, and it was really sad to realize that both of them died in five days time.
(Zarko Olujić, University of Delft)
- John will be sorely missed by his friends at Koch-Glitsch.
(Izak Nieuwoudt, Ph.D., Director – Research and Development, Koch-Glitsch)
- John was a great guy and I enjoyed working with him on Separations programming issues over the years. He was a guy who could always be counted on to do a good professional job, and who was always friendly, knowledgeable, and helpful. He was a thorough professional. We will miss him at AIChE. I wish we had more members like John.
(Joseph Cramer – AIChE)
- I will always think of John as being upbeat and energetic. He could recall the results of almost any test ever run at FRI, which always amazed me. He was a tremendous resource.
(Mark Pilling, Sulzer Chemtech)

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