

Obituary

Dear Nitrogen Fixation Community:

I regret to inform you that Dr. Edwin L. Schmidt, Professor Emeritus of Soil Science at The University of Minnesota, died on 11 May 1998 at his home in Falcon Heights, Minnesota at the age of 80. He was my friend and mentor and will be sorely missed.

Dr. Schmidt was born 5 November 1917 in Buffalo, New York. He earned his B.S. degree in 1940 from Syracuse University and a M.S. degree in plant sciences from Syracuse University in 1942. From 1943-1946 Dr. Schmidt served in the United States Naval Reserve as a Deck and Engineering Officer on minesweeping craft in the American and European theaters. He was Commanding Officer of USS YMS 373 from 1945-1946. In 1947 Dr. Schmidt was assigned as Microbiologist for the Bikini Atoll Scientific Resurvey Group, where he was on temporary active duty attached to the Office of Naval Research. In 1948 he married Elvira S. Steward and subsequently had four children.

After release from the Navy, Dr. Schmidt studied Soil Microbiology with Dr. Robert L. Starkey and Nobel Laureate Dr. Selman A. Waksman and received a Ph.D. from Rutgers University in 1949.

Dr. Schmidt spent from 1949-1950 as an instructor in the Bacteriology and Immunology Department (later to be renamed Microbiology) at the University of Minnesota. He was appointed as an Assistant Professor in 1950 and was promoted to Associate Professor (jointly with the Departments of Soil Science and Microbiology) in 1954. In 1963 Dr. Schmidt was promoted to Full Professor of Microbiology and Soil Science. He held that position until he retired in July 1988, after nearly 39 years of service to the University and the scientific community. Dr. Schmidt's retirement was commemorated by a Symposium in Terrestrial Microbial Ecology which was held on 26 May 1988. The symposium brought together his former students, staff, and research collaborators, from the U.S. and Canada, to discuss state-of-the-art papers on aspects of soil microbial ecology. Dr. Schmidt was awarded Professor Emeritus status and remained scientifically active for nearly 10 years after his retirement.

Dr. Schmidt's research career was long and illustrious. He was a pioneering scientist who had the ability to focus on complex ecological questions and develop the means for studying them. He is best known for his pioneering work on the use of fluorescent antibodies to study bacteria and fungi in situ and the ecology of nitrifying bacteria. Moreover, his seminal work on the mechanisms of host-microbe interactions led to the formulation of the lectin hypothesis, which had great impact on researchers studying *Rhizobium* and plant pathogenic bacteria. His career was extremely productive and his science was of exceptional quality. He authored well over one hundred research articles and published numerous book chapters, many of which are still recognized as classic studies. Dr. Schmidt was instrumental in the establishment of "The Moroccan Project", a U.S. Agency for International Development institution-building project between the College of Agriculture at the University of Minnesota and the Institute Agronomique et Veterinaire Hassan II in Morocco.

He received numerous awards and honors throughout his career. He was a John Simon Guggenheim Fellow, a Fellow of the American Society for Agronomy, The Soil Science Society of America, and the American Academy of Science. He also was the recipient of the Soil Science Research Award. Dr. Schmidt was a long time member of the American Society for Microbiology, The American Society for Agronomy, the Soil Science Society of America, AAAS, AAUP, The American Institute of Biological Sciences, International Soil Science Society and Sigma Xi.

Dr. Schmidt was an honest, kind, generous and compassionate person who cared deeply about his students. He mentored over 15 Ph.D and 14 masters students and 15 postdoctoral associates, many of whom have gone on to become some of the world's greatest scientists. He took great interest in the well being of all he taught. His commitment to excellence in science and life has been emulated by many of his students.

In addition to his dedication and love of science, was his unending love for his family and friends. Surviving are his wife of 50 years, Elvira Schmidt; daughter Molly and husband Duane Shodeen; daughter Marcia and husband John Downing; son Greg and wife Susie; and daughter Carole and husband Rich Brasch; and 7 grandchildren, Kate and Anna Downing, Andrew and Jaron Shodeen, Kiah and Max Brasch, and Sara Schmidt.

A memorial service was held on 28 May 1998 at The University Club of St. Paul, 420 Summit Ave., St. Paul, MN. Contributions in lieu of flowers may be made to Doctors Without Borders, 6 East 39th Street, 8th Floor, New York, NY 10016 or Amnesty International, 322 Eight Ave., New York, NY 10001.

Dr. Michael Sadowsky
Professor