

In Memoriam: Dr. Thomas MacRae

Dalhousie University Announcements <DAL-ANNOUNCEMENT@LISTS.DAL.CA>

on behalf of

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Tue 11/26/2019 8:55 AM

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In Memoriam: Dr. Thomas MacRae

The Faculty of Science and Dalhousie University would like to extend condolences and sympathies to the family, friends and many former colleagues and students of Dr. Thomas MacRae, who passed away November 20 at the age of 71 after an extended illness.

Educated at Mount Allison University and the University of Windsor, Tom returned to his hometown of Halifax in 1980 where he took up a faculty position in the Department of Biology. Tom taught thousands of students over the course of his nearly 40 years at the university, earning a reputation as an accomplished researcher and inspirational teacher who achieved excellence through his natural talent and easy rapport with students.

Tom was well known around the university for his versatility as a teacher. Whether he was working with large groups of students in introductory classes, smaller groups of senior students or one-on-one as a mentor and supervisor, Tom's dedication to students was exemplary, landing him many top teaching awards over the years. These included the national 3M Teaching Fellowship, the Faculty of Science Award for Excellence in Teaching, the Atlantic Universities' Instructional Leadership Award, among others.

Lauded for his impeccable organization and consistency as well as his efficient use of class time, Tom was motivated first and foremost by a spirit of service to students. His famous office rocking chair hosted countless students over the years for conversations not just about biological life, but life in general. As he told a Dal News reporter upon receiving the Dalhousie Alumni Association Award for Excellence in Teaching in 2008: "I really care about teaching and I really like being around students."

Tom's dedication to his students and to Dalhousie spilled beyond the classroom, too. He served as chair of the Department of Biology and on many committees over the years, lending a hand in spurring progress on issues ranging from curriculum review and development to student admissions and course evaluation. Tom remained active at the university even after his retirement in 2017, yet another symbol of his deep commitment to higher education and his incredible work ethic — something he passed on to his children, Adina and Ian.

Tom was an extraordinarily dedicated scientist whose research examined the molecular and cellular basis of how organisms deal with environmental stress. He pursued his research tirelessly, often seven days a week, with incredible focus, and continued to be engaged in his research even throughout much of his final illness. His dedication led to great success. His research was continuously funded by the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council (NSERC) throughout his career. At one time, NSERC used one of his grant applications as an example to others of how to craft an excellent research proposal. He authored more than 175 scientific papers and chapters in books. He was invited to give more than 80 lectures on his research, half of them outside of Canada. He was respected by scientists around the globe. Several years ago, when he was nominated for an award, colleagues in other countries responded with comments such as these: "internationally outstanding researcher" ... "Tom's work is always of the highest quality, and he is recognized widely as an international leader" ... "Many others have tried to gain this level of understanding of the mechanisms that induce stress tolerance ... and up to this point Tom is the only lab to have succeeded".

In his free time, Tom enjoyed cheering on the Montreal Canadiens and pursuing his love of photography, including as member of the Photo Guild of Nova Scotia for many years. His passing comes not long after he and his wife, Cheryl, celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary in September. In an obituary in [The Chronicle Herald](#), his family thanked the dedicated medical professionals who helped Tom overcome numerous health challenges over the years so he could enjoy “living life to the fullest.”

A Celebration of Life will be held today (Tuesday, Nov. 26) in Hope United Church at 11 a.m. Interment will be in Bayfield Cemetery at a later date. Donations in Tom’s honour can be made to a charity of choice or to the Dr. Thomas MacRae Graduate Prize via the Department of Biology — another way his impressive legacy will live on. The award is meant to help and encourage students in graduate studies with passion for research in biology.