

## **In Memoriam**

**John Letey, Jr.  
Distinguished Soil Physics Professor and Soil Physicist, Emeritus  
UC Riverside  
1933-2014**



Professor John Letey Jr. passed away suddenly September 14, 2014, at his home in Riverside, California.

John Letey was born June 13, 1933 in Carbondale, Colorado to Italian immigrants John and Rosina Letey. He graduated from Glenwood Springs High School in 1950, obtained his B.S. from Colorado State University in 1955 and PhD from the University of Illinois in 1959.

He joined the faculty in the Department of Irrigation and Soil Science at UCLA in 1959, but with the phasing out of agriculture at UCLA, he elected to join the Department of Soil Science at UCR in 1961 and enjoyed a distinguished career in research, teaching, administration, and service at the university. During his tenure, Dr. Letey served as chair of the Department of Soil and Environmental Science from 1975 to 1980, director of the Kearney Foundation of Soil Science from 1980 to 1985, and director of the University of California Center for Water Resources from 1999 to 2003. He was instrumental in the establishment of the Environmental Sciences undergraduate major at UCR, which was one of the first of its kind in the United States. He recognized and appreciated the critical link between science and policy and built teams and research to address it.

Professor Letey's research focused on all aspects of water quantity and quality related to irrigated agriculture that provided both applied and basic information critical to establishing sound water resource management. Topics of research included irrigation, drainage, salinity, pesticide transport, plant-water relations, nitrogen, soil

aeration, and polymers. He was also recognized as one of the world authorities on water-repellent soils and the utilization of surfactants.

Professor Letey was a fellow of SSSA, ASA, and AAAS and was awarded the SSSA Soil Science Distinguished Service Award in 2005 and the SSSA Soil Science Research Award in 1970. He authored or co-authored more than 300 technical publications concerning chemical, water, and gas movement through soil before retiring from UCR in 2002. In 2007, he published a fictional book titled, *The Folly of Fearing Death* (PublishAmerica, Baltimore).

In 2003, Professor Letey and Ardyth Stolzy, wife of the late Professor of Soil Physics Emeritus Lewis H. Stolzy, combined the Letey Soil Environmental Fund and the Lewis Stolzy Memorial Fund into the Stolzy–Letey Endowment in Soil and Environmental Science. The Stolzy–Letey Fund is now used for the benefit and support of the students in the Department of Environmental Sciences at UCR.

Professor Letey was a friend and mentor to students, visiting scholars, and faculty across the world. He served his research community, church, and family with great love and personal integrity. Professor Letey was survived by wife Sonia; sister Rose Asbury; three children Laura Petersen, Don Letey and Lisa Smith and their mother Marilyn; 10 grandchildren and 11 great-grandchildren.

This memorial was prepared by Alexander Barinov, Assistant Professor of Finance at the UCR School of Business, using information from public sources.