

obituaries

To notify the community about a colleague's death, subscribers can visit <http://www.physicstoday.org/obits>, where they can submit obituaries (up to 750 words), comments, and reminiscences. Each month recently posted material will be summarized here, in print. Select online obituaries will later appear in print.

Albert Wattenberg

Albert Wattenberg, a leading experimental particle physicist, died of coronary heart disease on 27 June 2007 in Urbana, Illinois.

Al was born on 13 April 1917 in New York City, and grew up there. He first became interested in science because of his brother, a chemist, who trained him "to keep his glassware very clean." While attending the City College of New York for his undergraduate degree, he became politically engaged and organized several strikes. Al was president of his senior class, but he protested the pro-Italian fascist sentiments of the City College president by staying away from his own graduation. He received his BS in 1938 and his MA, from Columbia University, in 1939.

His first job was in spectroscopic analysis at the Schenley Corp. At the same time, he continued graduate study at Columbia. In 1941 he was close to finishing his PhD when World War II intervened. Enrico Fermi invited Al to join his group, which was studying the fission of uranium. A young and talented experimentalist, Al learned to use Geiger counters and build photon and neutron detectors; he also served as draftsman and machinist. After 1943 he made and maintained all the radium and beryllium sources for the entire Manhattan Project. Fermi's thoroughness in experimental work was an example that affected Al's approach to experiments for the rest of his life.

In 1942 Fermi and his group moved to the University of Chicago, where on 2 December they obtained the first controlled nuclear chain reaction. Eugene Wigner presented Fermi with a bottle of Chianti, which everybody present signed. Al cleaned up after the event and kept the historical bottle.

When only in his mid-twenties, Al was put in charge of the group testing the purity of the uranium and heavy water used in the project. When Fermi moved to Los Alamos in 1944, Al stayed

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS



Albert Wattenberg

at Chicago, working in the lab that later became Argonne National Laboratory.

Al was one of the signatories of the July 1945 Szilard petition asking President Harry S. Truman not to use the nuclear bomb without warning. After the war, Al became one of the founders and activists of the Federation of Atomic Scientists. His organization, the Atomic Scientists of Chicago, joined with similar groups in Los Alamos, Oak Ridge, and Manhattan to form the FAS. Now known as the Federation of American Scientists, the FAS believes that scientists have an ethical obligation to bring their knowledge and experience to bear

Recently posted death notices at <http://www.physicstoday.org/obits>:

Nathaniel Joseph Merritt

19 August 1953 – 14 December 2007

Frederic H. Coensgen

10 February 1919 – 18 November 2007

Michael Douglas Wolter

27 November 1947 – 20 September 2007

Barry "Mike" Casper

21 January 1939 – 27 January 2007

on critical national decisions, particularly those pertaining to the humanitarian uses of science and technology.

After completing his PhD at the University of Chicago in 1947, Al stayed at Argonne to work with Fermi on building reactors to produce intense neutron beams. Neutron diffraction, facilitated by those beams, has had an enormous impact on materials science, biology, medicine, and chemistry.

Al became acting director of the physics division at Argonne in 1949. His interest in research in elementary particles, together with the growing anti-Communist scrutiny of government employees during the late 1940s, led him to leave Argonne in 1950 for the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and then MIT, where he worked from 1951 until 1958.

A prestigious research professorship lured Al back to the University of Illinois in 1958, and he remained there until his retirement in 1986. For almost 20 years, he led the particle physics group, which he and his Illinois colleagues developed into a strong and convivial organization, known for its superb electronics capabilities. In the 1950s and 1960s, Al studied K mesons and looked for violations of time reversal, CP, and CPT symmetries. He designed and built Cherenkov counters at Fermilab and quantum mechanics experiments for Illinois' teaching laboratories. He worked on J/ψ and charm production, first at Fermilab with neutron beams and with wideband photon beams (an important experiment that showed the hadronic nature of J/ψ), and later at SLAC in the first comprehensive study of the charm sector. Construction of that experiment's 700-counter muon detector was Al's last particle-physics project.

After retirement, Al participated in the American Physical Society's Forum on the History of Physics and was the editor of its newsletter. He participated in Illinois' program in arms control, disarmament, and international security and contributed to the FAS's *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*. Over the years he gave numerous talks about the beginnings of the nuclear era and about his work with Fermi. In 2001 he contributed to the University of Chicago's celebration of the 100th anniversary of Fermi's birth.

Throughout his life Al was a great teacher and a warm and wonderful friend. He will be deeply missed.

Inga Karliner
Jon J. Thaler
Gary E. Gladding

University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign ■