

# Why Aren't We Using Our Emeritus Members?

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Between January 1981 and January 1986, the total APS membership (excluding corporate members and library and other nonmember subscribers to our journals) rose from 3,828 to 4,275 and the number of emeritus members (retired and members of APS for at least 20 years) increased from 298, or 7.8% of the membership, to 353, or 8.3%. The number of emeritus members can be expected to increase at an even faster rate during the next 5–10 years as those who left graduate school during and just after World War II put away their microscopes, grade their last examinations,

and make their last official trip and speech. Mirroring total society, the trend is toward early retirement, perhaps at age 55 or 60. By the mid-1990s or even sooner, 10% or more of APS members will be emeritus.

Now come the questions: How are we treating our emeritus members? Why aren't we using them more effectively? What opportunities can we provide for them?

When the time comes to retire, most plant pathologists lose not only their offices, laboratories, and other facilities but also their access to research funds and money for expenses involved in attending regional and national meetings. Retirement income is often inadequate to support the costs of attending professional meetings. Perhaps 60% or more of plant pathologists look forward to retirement and a chance to "slow down" and enjoy hobbies and travel. Some pursue extra income via consulting, a few do some writing, and others find an institution willing to provide a facility for active, productive persons who wish to continue in research, teaching, or public service. But what about those who wish to continue doing what they are trained to do?

Our Society largely ignores our emeritus members and their interests. One or two may be placed on an endowments or archives committee, and that's about it. Shouldn't something be done to encourage more retired members to remain active in APS and attend regional and national meetings? In 1983, when R. E. Ford was president, emeritus members were personally invited to attend a special noon meeting held at the Iowa State University Memorial Union in conjunction with the national meeting. The room was packed and the discussion lively, and the meeting broke up long after its scheduled adjournment. The number of emeritus members attending this national meeting was at least 10 times that attending any other national meeting in my memory—going back to 1946. This proves that if the Society has something to offer our retirees, the interest is there. Sadly, once a member retires, the chances of any of us seeing that person again at a meeting or elsewhere are almost nil.

Then why aren't we involving our emeritus members more fully in Society affairs? Many, of course, would decline for a variety of excellent reasons. But if 100 or 200 wish to help write a compendium, monograph, classic, book, or other APS publication or to serve on one of our more than 40 committees, then why are we passing up years of experience and expertise? Say that 200 retired members would be willing to serve the

Society in some fashion and that each had been a professional plant pathologist for 30 years—that's 6,000 years of experience going largely to waste! I think it's a shame to see our emeritus members "cut off" when they retire—no more office, laboratory, or field plots—when many would prefer to stay active in some capacity. Does our Society owe something to these scientists for their long and often distinguished careers?

So, what can or should our Society be doing for emeritus members? The following are my thoughts (they only scratch the surface—you can think of others in just a few minutes):

1. APS should maintain a directory of emeritus members who wish to remain active in plant pathology. This could be accomplished through a simple questionnaire mailed from our St. Paul office or printed on a tear-away page in *Phytopathology News*. Logical questions include who would be willing to replace someone on a sabbatical leave, to serve on a short- or long-term USAID or similar project in a developing country, to give a series of seminars or lectures, to write or help write an APS publication, to serve as an editor, or to help prepare visual aids such as slide sets and video cassettes. What marvelous teaching would be available if only we had such giants as Erwin F. Smith, E. C. Stakman, H. H. Whetzel, L. R. Jones, M. W. Gardner, and L. O. Kunkel on video cassettes describing their important research findings. Departments of plant pathology used to offer a course (usually required) on the history of plant pathology. We haven't had a book published on the history of our profession since Whetzel's in 1918. History courses have largely faded away along with the foreign language requirements and have been replaced by expertise in statistics and computers. Sometimes I think we are losing our perspective in plant pathology and "rediscovering the wheel" by ignoring what made our science and Society what they are today. Our retired members can help bring some of our history back to life. Perhaps a retiree will step forward and write a book for APS Press about the history of our science.

2. APS should encourage emeritus members to attend regional and national meetings. One way would be to provide a room where emeritus members could socialize with their peers and meet graduate students and young staff members who know them only by reputation. This could result in an exchange of ideas for all concerned and would go a long way toward making our retired members feel welcome, wanted, and useful.

3. APS should have an active Emeritus Committee that assembles at national meetings, elects officers, and plans activities for retired members who wish to remain active in the profession and the Society. I suggest that Council appoint a committee, perhaps made up of former APS presidents, to examine what can be done for emeritus members, plan a suitable questionnaire, and implement a directory listing the interests of retired members who wish to contribute their talents. This could be very valuable to department heads or chairpersons and others who are seeking seminar speakers, guest lecturers, teachers on a quarter or semester basis, researchers for short- or long-term projects, extension specialists, industry persons, or perhaps someone to fill a foreign assignment when an active staff member is not available (age and experience rank higher in many developing countries than in the United States).

That's my challenge. Let us give our emeritus members an opportunity to remain active plant pathologists and continue careers of their own choosing at a pace they can enjoy. Personally, I plan to remain an active plant pathologist as long as my physical and mental abilities remain—perhaps to age 108. I'm just worried there won't be anything to do after retirement except "go out to pasture."