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Kubler shared lessons about research -- and about life

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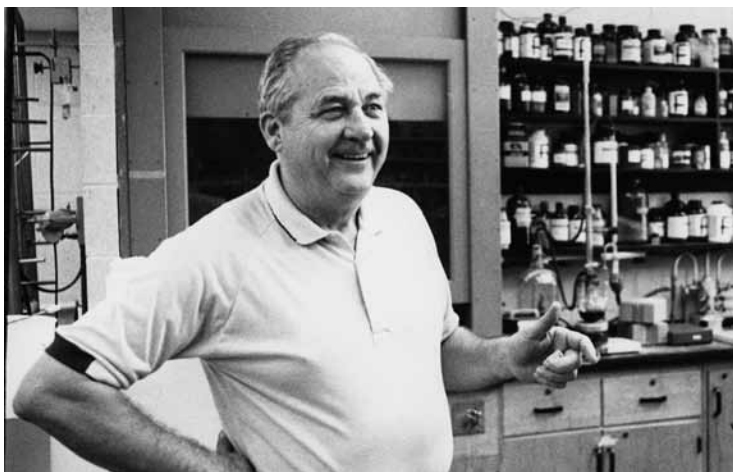
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Kubler shared lessons about research — and about life



AT THE CELEBRATION of the life of Don Kubler June 4 in Furman's Patrick Lecture Hall, Randy Finley '76 recalled his first encounter with the legendary chemistry professor.

"I met Dr. Kubler 37 years ago, when I found out he would be my research director for the summer undergraduate research program," Finley said of his mentor, who died May 26 at the age of 88. "I had heard the stories. He was almost mythical, larger than life. Students would quake before his office door. Some would come out enlightened; others, in tears."

Finley added, "Dr. Kubler expected his students to maximize their potential. He became impatient with intellectually or physically lazy students. I was no exception!"

But Finley, now a corporate vice president in Montclair, N.J., said he also discovered that if you stuck with Kubler — and if Kubler stuck with you — the benefits would last a lifetime.

"It was the integrity of the scientific approach, the intellectual honesty and joy of uncovering a small part of the nature of the universe, that Dr. Kubler led his students to embrace. He taught us to persevere and stay true to the quest for truth, even when grades and senior papers were on the line, for when the true answer becomes revealed, the elegant simplicity is magical," Finley said. "These lessons of research were also lessons of life that were to follow his students throughout their careers."

Kubler joined the Furman faculty in 1961 after working first as a research chemist with Union Carbide in West Virginia, and then teaching briefly at the University of South Carolina (his alma mater) and Hampden-Sydney College. A member of Phi Beta Kappa, he earned his doctorate from

the University of Maryland and was a U.S. Navy veteran, having spent four years in the Pacific during World War II.

In remarks written for the Kubler celebration, Noel Kane-Maguire, who retired this spring after 38 years on the chemistry faculty, said, "Don was one of those genuine, highly intelligent individuals who felt and spoke passionately about many things. And whatever he did, he did with gusto and conviction. Among his many accomplishments, he played a critical role, along with Stuart Patterson and others, in putting in place many of the signature components of our chemistry program which are responsible for much of the success we enjoy today."

One example: In 1964 Kubler obtained a grant from the National Science Foundation that helped launch a new era in the department and paved the way for today's nationally known summer undergraduate research program. Kubler also chaired the department for six years and served for a time as advisor to Furman's premedical students. In 1970 he was named the second recipient of the Alester G. Furman, Jr., and Janie Earle Furman Award for Meritorious Teaching.

Kane-Maguire said of his friend and colleague, "Don could be exceedingly charming and yet a somewhat intimidating presence. And if you took a different position than his on a particular matter about which he felt strongly, you had better arrive with well-prepared arguments and, as a precautionary measure, perhaps wear your most trusted flak-vest."

Kubler was active in civic affairs and donated his time to assist local and regional officials with arson investigations. He was instrumental in the creation of the River Falls Volunteer Fire Department and was one of its charter commissioners. After retiring from Furman in 1985 he was a tutor with the Greenville County Literacy Association and did extensive research on dyslexia, conducting a clinical study in China and England and working with dyslexic students in the area.

In recognition of Kubler's contributions to Furman, a laboratory in the Townes Center for Science is named in his honor. In addition, the Donald G. Kubler and C. Stuart Patterson Fund for Undergraduate Research in Chemistry, established in 2002, provides financial support to chemistry students.

Don Kubler was a meticulous and exacting professor, but as Randy Finley said, "As hard as he drove his students, he drove himself. He did not accept the status quo, nor did he expect someone else to do the work. He led by example and instilled this into his students."

Kubler is survived by his wife, Rose Bannister Kubler '48, three sons, and a daughter.

— JIM STEWART