

UCD Chancellor Emeritus Mrak dies at age 85

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By ELISABETH SHERWIN

A memorial service for UC Davis Chancellor Emeritus Emil Mrak, who headed UCD from 1959 to 1969, will be held Tuesday at 2 p.m. in Freeborn Hall on the UCD campus.

Mrak, 85, died Thursday night at the UCD Medical Center in Sacramento.

Mrak was stricken with a heart attack at the Sacramento Metropolitan Airport as he and his wife, Vera Greaves Mrak, were returning from a visit with their son, Robert, in Little Rock, Ark.

He was taken by Life Flight helicopter to the Medical Center where attempts to revive him were unsuccessful.

Survivors, in addition to his wife and son, include daughter Antoinette Hodapp of Davis and four grandchildren.

Mrak remained active in university affairs for the past 18 years since his retirement. He had an office in University House on campus, which was built in 1907 to house the director of the newly created University Farm, later to become UCD.

After retirement he also held the title of professor-emeritus of food technology in the UCD College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences and food technologist emeritus in the Agricultural Experiment Station. He also remained active as a consultant.

"Emil Mrak's entire career as a student, agricultural scientist and administrator was devoted to the University of California," UC President David Gardner said today.

"He was a fine scholar and a man of great compassion. He had a special interest in and concern for students, going out of his way to make them feel welcome and a part of the university community.

"For example, each year on the day before Thanksgiving he would seek out Davis students who had nowhere to spend the holidays and invite them to dinner," Gardner said.

While Mrak was chancellor, he instructed his secretaries not to screen his calls in order for him to speak directly to students and not scare them away.

"The entire university community joins together in expressing its

See Mrak, Page 2



Emil Mrak

PAGE 2

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FRIDAY, APRIL 10, 1987

Mrak

Continued from Page 1

admiration and respect for Chancellor Emeritus Mrak and for his contributions to the university . . . and extends its deepest sympathy to his wife and family," Gardner added.

Mrak was internationally known for his work on the preservation of foods and was one of the world's authorities on the biology of yeasts.

"Chancellor Mrak was the most important person to this campus," Chancellor James Meyer said today.

"He led UCD during the most rapid growth period this campus has ever seen or ever will see. He provided the character and foundations that led to the university's present stature. I will miss his advice and support."

The administration building on campus was named in Mrak's honor.

"Emil Mrak was a neighbor of mine, a friend and a foremost citizen of Davis," Mayor Dave Rosenberg said today. "My sympathies go out to Vera and his family. He will be missed, but remembered.

"He certainly lived a full and rich life."

Mrak was born in San Francisco in 1901 and was raised on a prune ranch in the Santa Clara Valley. He received his bachelor's, master's and doctoral degree from UC Berkeley and became an instructor of food technology there in 1937, the year he

received his doctorate.

During the war years of 1944 and 1945, Mrak served as a civilian scientist with the U.S. Army, working on the development of rations that could withstand climate extremes and the rigors of military transport.

In 1948 he became chair of the department of food science and technology and moved, in 1951, with most of the departmental staff, to the Davis campus.

Since his earliest years with the university, he had been interested in the preservation of fruits by drying and had become increasingly concerned with world food problems, particularly in developing nations.

Mrak's oral history was captured for the university by the late A.I. Dickman. The 655-page history is called "A Journey Through Three Epochs: Food Prophet, Creative Chancellor, Senior Statesman of Science."

During Mrak's chancellorship the campus added its Graduate Division, the College of Engineering, the School of Law and the School of Medicine. And while he was chancellor, Olson, Sproul, Wellman, Kerr, Briggs, Bainer, Roessler, Kleiber and Mrak halls were built.

Mrak collected numerous professional awards and honors throughout his lifetime.

Clark Kerr, who was president of the University of California during Mrak's chancellorship, said today: "Emil will go down in history as the greatest leader among many great leaders in the splendid history of the Davis campus."

Contributions in lieu of flowers may be made to the Emil Mrak Memorial Fund, the office of the chancellor, UC Davis, Davis Calif. 95616.