

*Home > News > IN MEMORIAM: John R. Whitaker, food science and technology*

## **IN MEMORIAM: John R. Whitaker, food science and technology**

By Dave Jones on November 4, 2013 in [University News](#)



*Photo: Professor  
Emeritus John R.  
Whitaker*

**F**ood scientist John R. Whitaker, a professor emeritus and former associate dean, died Sept. 28 at St. John's Retirement Village in Woodland. He was 84 and had been suffering from Alzheimer's disease.

Whitaker

He joined the faculty in 1956, and would become as much a well respected member of the campus community as the man who interviewed and hired him, Emil Mrak, the then-chair of the Department of Food Technology who would become the chancellor three years later.

Whitaker received the Academic Senate's Distinguished Scholarly Public Service Award, and had a student residence hall named after him at the Colleges of La Rue in recognition of contributions to the undergraduate educational experience at UC Davis.

and Food Chemistry Division of the American Chemical Society, and the American Association for the Advancement of Science.

He was known abroad as well, having begun teaching and training researchers internationally in 1968, when he was invited to teach as a visiting professor of chemistry at the National University of Mexico.

In 1980, he wrote the first official agreement of cooperation between UC Davis and foreign universities. He held several leadership positions with UC's MEXUS program — which facilitates collaboration between UC and Mexico, and was elected to Mexican Academy of Sciences.

Whitaker took emeritus status in 1993 and continued teaching and conducting research at numerous universities overseas until 2006.

His major research emphasis had to do with food related enzymes and their changes during processing and storage. Over the course of his 50-year career, some 128 graduate students and visiting scientists joined him as researchers in his lab.

Whitaker published more than 270 articles on the purification, structure and function of food enzymes, enzyme inhibitors, and on other proteins, with 63 being published after retirement.

He was the editor or co-editor of 12 books, the most recent, *Handbook of Food Enzymology*. Additionally, he was the editor of the *Journal of Food Biochemistry* for 19 years.

He was born in Lubbock, Texas, and raised in Alabama, where he attended a one-room schoolhouse and helped on his family's farm, recalling once that he picked 100 pounds of cotton in one day when he was 5 years old.

He received a bachelor's degree in chemistry from Berea College, Berea, Ky., in 1951; and a doctorate in agricultural biochemistry from Ohio State University in 1954. Upon graduation,

Then he brought his young family to Davis, where he started as an instructor and junior food technologist, and moved up to professor and biochemist in the Department of Food Science and Technology in 1967. He served two stints as associate dean in the College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences, 1975-83 and 1986-90, and chair of the Department of Biochemistry and Biophysics in between.

He is survived by his wife of 61 years, Gwen C. Whitaker; four children, Dianne Whitaker of San Mateo, Pamela Crandall of Renton, Wash., Brenda Domingues of Plymouth, Minn., and Judy Whitaker of Davis; a sister, Eldora Roe of Birmingham, Ala., and a brother, Vernon of Grant, Ala.; and four grandchildren.

No memorial service. Remembrances may be made to [Alzheimer's Association, Northern California and Northern Nevada Chapter](#); [St. John's Retirement Village](#), Manor West; or [Yolo Hospice](#).

## Media contact(s)

**Dave Jones**, Dateline, 530-752-6556, [dljones@ucdavis.edu](mailto:dljones@ucdavis.edu)

### *Tags*

General Interest

### *Categories*

University News