

ASU honors distinguished faculty member

BY ALDEMARO ROMERO
AND MARTIN HUSS
SPECIAL TO THE SUN

More than three decades of teaching, service and research go a long way, particularly when it comes to someone who mentored and taught several generations of students.

On Dec. 4, faculty and students of the Arkansas State University Department of Biological Sciences unveiled a plaque honoring Dr. Leon Richards' 31 years of service from 1963 to 1994. The plaque is located in the General Botany Lab in which Richards taught so many over the years. Students, colleagues and friends at the reception recounted the valuable contribution that Richards made over his many years of dedicated service.

Thanks to donations from ASU alumni and university funds, the lab on the Jonesboro campus'

Lab Sciences West building was refurbished and now is up to the highest teaching standards.

Leon Richards was born in 1927 in the coal mining community of Latuda, Utah. He graduated from Carbon County High School. When his family moved to Boise, Idaho, in 1947, he enrolled in Boise Junior College. After serving in the U.S. Marine Corps during the Korean War, he entered the University of Idaho and received his bachelor's and master's degrees in botany from the University of Idaho in Moscow.

Richards moved to Lawrence, Kan., in 1958 to work on his doctorate in botany at the University of Kansas. He studied under herbarium curator Dr. Ronald L. McGregor, who is renowned for his work on the flora of the Great Plains. Richards received his doctorate in 1963 and moved to Jonesboro to teach at then-

Arkansas State College. His research describing the similarities and differences among species of prairie coneflowers is noteworthy, and include a new species that he discovered in Mexico, which he named *Ratibida latipalearis*:

Humor, rigor

Known for his engaging sense of humor and rigorous teaching style, he taught numerous courses at ASU including general biology, general botany, plant morphology, undergraduate and graduate plant taxonomy, economic botany, wildflowers of Arkansas and plant ecology. He encouraged his students, regardless of their major field of study, to grow in a deeper knowledge and appreciation for the biological importance of plants in the natural world.

While working at ASU, Richards collaborated

with Howard Moore to start the local branch of the Society of Sigma Xi, later serving as president. He also provided leadership as a former president of the Faculty Association, the Faculty Senate and the Arkansas Academy of Science.

Richards spent many years adding to the collection of plant specimens in the collection that he curated in the ASU Herbarium. Most of the 50,000 specimens in its collection represent plants obtained from Crowley's Ridge and throughout Arkansas. Richards' interest in plants was not restricted to local species — he traveled to Costa Rica in 1989 to study the Pejibaye palm and other neotropical plant species.

Richards lives in Jonesboro with his wife, Beverly, and enjoys visits from his children, grandchildren, former students, colleagues and friends.



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Dr. Leon Richards unveils a plaque honoring his years of service at Arkansas State University.

For more information, contact the ASU Department of Biological Sciences at biology@astate.edu.

Dr. Romero is the chairman and Dr. Huss an associate professor in the Department of Biological Sciences at Arkansas State University.