

Leon Kane Maguire 1942 – 2011



Leon Kane-Maguire (left) with long-time friend and colleague Professor Gordon Wallace (right)

Emeritus Professor Leon Kane Maguire was one of Australia's leading research scientists in the specialist field of conducting organic polymers and their properties. His pioneering work led to many international awards and the development of several new fields of science.

Leon, a reflection twin with brother Noel, was born in Brisbane on May 4th, 1942. Both young boys showed scholarly aptitude with Leon going on to complete an undergraduate science degree in 1964 and a PhD in chemistry in 1967. For his PhD at the University of Queensland, he was awarded a University Medal. He then undertook postdoctoral studies at Northwestern University in the US, and later, further studies in chemistry at University College in London and at Cambridge University. In 1971 he was appointed Lecturer in Chemistry at University College in Cardiff, Wales. During this time, Leon grew to love all things Welsh – the history, language, the scenery, the rugby, the music, and the people.

In 1983 he returned to Australia to take up a professorship and began a long and fruitful relationship with the University of Wollongong. He served there as Head of the Department of Chemistry for over ten years and subsequently as Director of the Institute for Molecular Recognition. His passion for science helped build the reputation of the University of Wollongong into a leading research university. His pioneering research work in nano-materials was balanced by his down-to-earth attitude and a wicked sense of humour enjoyed by all. A massive and infectious enthusiasm for life enabled him to build a close rapport with the students he mentored, inspiring them to greater challenges and achievements.

Over the last fifteen years Leon was a key member of the Intelligent Polymer Research Institute which he helped to establish. The Institute, that now has a world class reputation for innovation and discovery, focuses on research into electro-materials and bio-polymers and

their application in industry and medicine. As a researcher he was inclusive and generous in the recognition of his colleagues. His vision and drive were also instrumental in helping secure the funding that led to the establishment of the ARC Centre of Excellence for Electromaterials Science (ACES) where he continued to play an important leadership role in all aspects of the Centre.

But chemistry was not Leon's only passion. After his family and science, he also maintained a strong association with the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) and an interest in war-time aviation as a result of his father serving in No 464 Squadron (RAAF) during World War Two. Sadly, his father was shot down over the English Channel when Leon was only one year old. It led to his lifelong quest to find his father and together with Air Commodore (Retd) Mark Lax, he co-authored *The Gestapo Hunters*, the story of his father's squadron.

He wrote or co-wrote two more highly regarded RAAF Squadron histories, *To See the Dawn Again* (462 Squadron) and *The Desert Scorpions* (459 Squadron). In 2010 he was awarded first prize in the RAAF Heritage Awards for his fourth book *Lost Without Trace*, describing the service and ultimate loss of Squadron Leader Wilbur Wackett, son of Australia's leading aircraft designer, Sir Lawrence Wackett. This book which will be published later this year. These literary achievements were in addition to the 183 academic publications he wrote during his scientific career.

Leon's parting gift to his children and niece was a detailed history of his father's life (their grandfather whom they never met), completed just days before he passed away.

Leon Kane-Maguire will be remembered particularly by both his students and his colleagues with deep felt appreciation for the opportunities afforded to those in academia, and was always the first to celebrate a colleague's success or achievement.

He was made Emeritus Professor of the University of Wollongong in 2010, celebrating a lifelong achievement and commitment to science and education.

Leon is survived by his wife Barbara and their three children - Andrew, John and Nicole, and his twin brother Noel, also a professor of chemistry, who resides in the USA.

Andrew Kane-Maguire and Bernie Goldie