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Community message about the passing of C. Thomas Hess

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Community message about the passing of C. Thomas Hess

1 message

Office of Human Resources <hr-um@maine.edu>
Reply-To: Office of Human Resources <hr-um@maine.edu>
To:

Fri, May 31, 2024 at 11:00 AM

The University of Maine community extends its deepest sympathy to the family, colleagues and friends of C. Thomas Hess, professor emeritus of physics, who passed away on May 22, 2024. He was 83.

Hess joined the UMaine community in 1969 as an assistant professor and taught for 52 years until his retirement in 2021. More than 5,000 students benefited from his teaching, including the 18 master's and Ph.D. students he advised.

As a scientist, Hess published 75 journal articles, conference publications, technical reports and abstracts, and contributed to dozens of other studies. He addressed the risk of radon to human health and measured radioactivity in soils, water, air, aquaculture, lake sediments, homes and schools in Maine. He shared his findings with elementary schools and homeowners to help them stay safe, and contributed to the creation of state and federal standards limiting radon exposure in homes and workplaces. It is estimated that these standards have saved tens of thousands of people from getting cancer. He also served on UMaine's radiation safety committee, including many years as its chair.

"Tom helped shape our department for over 50 years. His environmental and health physics work had a direct, positive impact on the lives of the people of Maine and beyond. He was an inspirational adviser, unwaveringly supportive of students in both research and teaching. He was both a mentor and a friend to many faculty and staff in the department," said John Thompson, professor and chair of the Department of Physics and Astronomy. "Indeed, he viewed the department as his extended family; some of his colleagues were his closest friends. His wit, playfulness and optimism consistently lifted those around him. I can absolutely speak for the entire department when I say that it was an honor and a privilege to have had him as a colleague."

In addition to educating students and conducting research, Hess participated in several professional societies over the years, including the American Physical Society, American Association of Physics Teachers, Health Physics Society, American Association for Advancement of Science and American Nuclear Society.

During his tenure, Hess was also able to work with his son and fellow physics professor, Sam Hess, for nearly 20 years.

"Tom Hess was an inventive scientist, a kind teacher and a caring public servant whose advocacy preserved many people from harm due to radon exposure. When he retired, he had been a faculty member at UMaine for exactly a third of its history. Even after he retired, he kept track of his department and was concerned about its well-being. He is greatly missed," said Emily Haddad, dean of UMaine's College of Liberal Arts and Sciences.

His obituary is [online](#).

UMaine students, faculty or staff in need of support can contact the Counseling Center, 207.581.1392, the university's Employee Assistance Program, 877.622.4327, or the Dean of Students Office, 207.581.1406.