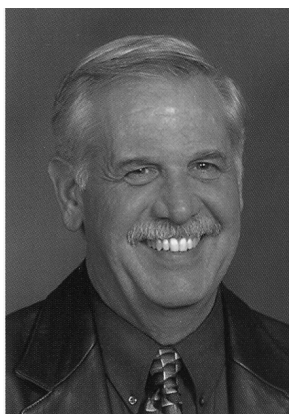


## OAS Lifetime Achievement Award

### Ronal J. Tyrl



On 5 November 2009, the Oklahoma Academy of Science, at its annual Technical Meeting, surprised longtime member Ronald J. Tyrl by bestowing upon him a Lifetime Achievement Award for his contributions

to the advancement of science in the state. In presenting the award to him, Susan Barber, past-president of the Academy, described Ron as an extraordinary teacher, a dedicated mentor to both undergraduate and graduate students, an unwavering supporter of academy activities, and a productive scientist collaborating with other scientists in a variety of disciplines.

Ron's contributions to Oklahoma began in 1972 when he began teaching at Oklahoma State University. Earning a B.A. in biology from Park College in Missouri and M.S. and Ph.D. degrees in systematic botany from Oregon State University, he started his teaching career as an Assistant Professor of Biology at Park before coming to OSU. Ron rose through the ranks from Assistant Professor to Professor of Botany, as well as serving as Curator of the Herbarium. He taught many different courses including: Plant Biology, Plant Taxonomy, Plant Diversity, Agrostology, Cytogenetics, Phylogeny & Classification, Vascular Aquatic Plants, and Biology for Teachers. His signature course was Field Botany; many state biologists remember well the weekend field trips to the four corners of the state, the plant collections, and, of course, the innumerable identification quizzes and tests. In addition to his OSU teaching, Ron also taught summer courses for 21 years at the University

of Oklahoma's Biological Station on Lake Texoma. In addition to teaching traditional courses, he also offered Elderhostel programs on wildflowers, grasses, and ethnobotany, and led wildflower tours of England, Scotland, and Ireland. He was Director of the first Oklahoma Summer Scholars Program in 1999 and 2000, and was a teacher in summer academies for Native Americans and for the Oklahoma Principals' Science Scholars.

In addition to teaching, Ron served as the biology and botany undergraduate advisor from 1980-1990 and from 1999-2004. During that time, he established a great rapport with many students, successfully guiding them through their undergraduate years. Ron mentored 30 graduate students throughout his 36 years of teaching at OSU, and he also served on committees for many more students in a variety of disciplines ranging from art to zoology. Five of his graduate students, all teachers and members of the Academy, were in attendance for the award presentation. In her nomination letter, one of his students commented that "Many of us patterned our careers on his example."

Numerous teaching awards reflect Ron's commitment to his students and their learning experiences. He was named Outstanding Teacher by OSU's Mortar Board Society and Agronomy Student Association in 1988 and 1989. He was awarded the College of Arts & Sciences Outstanding Teacher Award twice (1989, 2006), as well as the OSU Regents Distinguished Teaching Award in 1992 and 2003 and the AMOCO Outstanding Faculty Award for Undergraduate Teaching in 1994. In 2004, he received the Oklahoma Medal for Excellence in College & University Teaching given by the Oklahoma Foundation for Excellence and considered by many to be the state's highest teaching award.

As many members of the Academy are

aware, Ron has contributed much to the functioning of our society. He is an active member! Prior to his retirement, there rarely was a technical meeting at which he, his students, or his collaborators did not present papers in the botany section. He believes that the Academy and its *Proceedings* are most appropriate places for individuals to present their research on Oklahoma plants. The knowledge is disseminated to other botanists and the presentations of papers allow students to hone their skills at data presentation. He served as Copy Editor for the *Proceedings* for four years and has continually served as a manuscript reviewer. He also served as President of the Academy in 1998–1999.

Ron has also contributed to other professional societies and organizations. For many years, he was an active member of the Southwestern Association of Naturalists, serving as Secretary from 1979–83 and Governor from 1983–84. A founding member of the Oklahoma Native Plant Society, he served on its first board of directors and is currently serving again. He also was the first Chair of ONPS's Cross Timbers Chapter, a position that he also once again holds. In recognition of his outstanding service in botany, ONPS awarded Ron the Bess Snodgrass Memorial Award in 2000 and the Anne Long Award in 2004. He has also served as Governor of the Ouachita Mountains Biological Station and the Texas Oklahoma Regional Consortium of Herbaria.

Ron's research activities have contributed to our understanding of the flora and vegetation of Oklahoma. There are few who

would dispute that he is one of the preeminent field botanists in the state. His scholarly works include hundreds of presentations given to student groups, garden clubs, civic groups and botanical organizations, journal articles, technical papers and reports, book chapters, and several books. Recent publications include co-authorship of: the second edition of *Field Guide to Oklahoma Plants* that appeared in 2008, *Handbook of Toxic Plants of North America* in 2006, and *Dyes from American Native Plants: A Practical Guide* in 2005. One of Ron's greatest strengths is his ability to bring collaborators together. As Coordinating Editor of the *Flora of Oklahoma* project, he has managed the endeavor since its inception. In 2005, *Keys and Descriptions for the Vascular Plants of Oklahoma* was published. This publication is a significant milestone in that it allows replacement of U.T. Waterfall's 1969 book which has been the major reference for plant identification for more than 30 years. Ron's dedication to this project is legendary. Although Ron formally retired in June 2008, his professional activities continue. His retirement projects include writing the second edition of the encyclopedic *The Toxic Plants of North America* and directing the completion of the *Flora of Oklahoma*. He also plans to continue participating in functions of Oklahoma Native Plant Society and the Oklahoma Academy of Science.

As a teacher, mentor, scientist, and colleague, Ron has had a profound influence on many individuals. This Lifetime Achievement Award reflects his many contributions to the advancement of science in Oklahoma.