

Bennet B. Brabson

Bennet B. Brabson retired last spring after 35 years of distinguished service to Indiana University. Ben will be remembered above all as the best teacher and mentor in the history of the IU Department of Physics. Over the years his boundless enthusiasm, love of science, and natural rapport with young people have been an inspiration to his students and his colleagues.

Ben was born in Washington, D.C. on July 29, 1938. He received his B.A. from Carleton College in 1960. He got an early start in developing his natural teaching skills while at Carleton, serving as a teaching assistant there from 1958 to 1960. Ben did his graduate work at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, where he received his Ph.D. in physics in June 1966 for a thesis entitled " π -p Charge Exchange and Eta Production near the $N^*1/2$ (2650) Resonance." After receiving his Ph.D., Ben remained at MIT for one year as research associate, followed by a year at the Istituto di fisica in Padua, Italy, where he served as an NSF postdoctoral fellow.

In 1968 Ben joined the IU faculty as an assistant professor of physics, working in the department's high energy physics group. In the period 1985 to 1995 Ben was a prolific member of this group, publishing over 120 articles in top-tier high energy physics journals. His work was wide-ranging, including searches for exotic particle states such as 4-quark meson systems; work he performed at the Stanford Linear Accelerator Center (SLAC); the study of J/Psi resonances at the European Center for Nuclear Research (CERN), decays of the tau meson in the HRS at SLAC; the first observance of the decays of the Z0 with MarkII at SLAC; and a search for glueballs, exotics, and hybrids at Brookhaven National Laboratory. Interestingly, recent results in which 5-quark baryonic systems have apparently been produced at CERN have sparked renewed interest in Ben's early work. During this period Ben was promoted rapidly through the ranks, becoming an associate professor in 1972 and a full professor in 1976. In addition he held visiting positions at CERN in 1977-78 and at SLAC in 1988-89.

In 1996 Ben decided to refocus his research program, and, in what will come as no surprise to those who know Ben, he chose a new field of enormous importance to modern society: climate physics. In making this transition, Ben spent a sabbatical in 1996 and a portion of each summer in subsequent years at the University of East Anglia working with members of their Climatic Research Unit.

A recent focus of Ben's work involves the study of extremes of temperature and climate change. World average temperature increases over the past 100 years constitute a portion of the body of evidence for global warming. Because of their greater impact, *extreme temperatures* during this period are of particular interest, and a proper account of these extremes is necessary to interpret accurately the historical record.

During his years of service to Indiana University Ben has stood out as one of our truly exceptional teachers, standing head and shoulders above all others in the physics department in both his effectiveness and the affection he inspires in his students. Sitting in on one of Ben's classes, one sees how physics should be taught. His teaching skills have earned Ben numerous awards. He was a recipient of Indiana University's Ulysses G. Weatherly Award for teaching in 1974, and has been a member of the Faculty Colloquium on Excellence in Teaching (FACET) from 1990 to the present. He received TERA awards in 1997, 1998, and 1999, and an IU Trustees Teaching Award in 2001. He has been quite active in curriculum development, including an environmental physics course and a revamped energy and technology course that currently attracts more than 100 business school students per year. During the period 2000-02 he served as president of IU Bloomington's chapter of the American Association of University Professors. He has been an exceptional citizen of the university, serving since 1990 on the Bloomington Faculty Council.

A recent chance interaction with a former IU student illustrates clearly the impact that Ben has had on IU. After learning that this gentleman had attended IU as an undergraduate, I asked what he remembered of the experience. He replied that his most vivid recollection was of an introductory physics course that he had taken from Ben as a freshman, which was a learning experience like none other he had experienced in his life. (I believe he used the word "luminous.") He asked me whether Ben was still active, and I was happy to reply that yes, indeed he was, and just as good as he remembered. I am sure that there are thousands of former IU students with the same story. We will all miss Ben tremendously, and we wish him the best in his well-earned retirement.

Jim Musser