

Obituary: Myron C. Ledbetter

Myron C. Ledbetter, a senior cell biologist and highly respected member of BNL's Biology Department for 23 years, died on June 1, 2016, at the age of 92. Having joined the Lab in 1985, he retired on December 31, 1988.



The following obituary was published in Newsday on June 24, 2016:

Myron Ledbetter dies; ex-Brookhaven Lab plant biologist was 92

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By Sophia Chang sophia.chang@newsday.com

HIGHLIGHTS

'Renaissance figure' served in Navy during World War II
Won Distinguished Scientist Award, Biological Sciences

Myron Ledbetter, a highly respected biologist, had a deep love for life outside the laboratory as well: opera, theater, fine dining and an active social life.

“He was just a remarkable person, almost a renaissance figure,” said his niece Diana Doyle of North Haven, Connecticut. “He had so many interests and abilities.”

Ledbetter died at his home in Belle Terre on June 1 of complications from liver cancer. He was 92.

Born in Ardmore, Oklahoma, Ledbetter was starting college at Oklahoma State University when World War II began. He joined the Navy and served aboard a tank landing ship in Okinawa. He finished his degree in plant biology at OSU and went on to the University of California, Berkeley for his master’s degree, ultimately getting a doctorate in botany from Columbia University. He eventually took a position as a cell biologist at Brookhaven National Laboratory in 1965.

In his time at Brookhaven lab until his retirement in 1988, Ledbetter and a co-worker published research on the discovery of a new organelle in plant cells — the microtubule — that launched a new area of plant cell biology research. He also co-invented a self-cleaning aperture for electron microscopes that is still used today. The Electron Microscopy Society of America awarded him the Distinguished Scientist Award, Biological Sciences, in 1996.

He also established the Myron C. Ledbetter Diversity Scholarship at his alma mater of OSU, which awarded him the OSU Distinguished Alumni Award in 2000.

He and his husband, John D'Aquila, were together for more than 50 years, and got married in 2012.

"Everyone kept asking, 'Why don't you get married?' and he would say we didn't want to bother," Doyle said. "And then there was an insurance thing where Uncle John would only be covered if they were married — a shotgun wedding, they joked."

Even after retirement, Ledbetter kept busy.

He enjoyed going to shows in Manhattan as well as at Port Jefferson's Theatre Three. He was also a co-founder of the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute at Stony Brook University, where he learned to make stained-glass pieces, including some based on his own microscopic plant cell enlargements.

D'Aquila died in 2014. Ledbetter, who was cremated, had requested that no funeral be held.

A celebration of his life will be held at 11 a.m. Sunday at the Belle Terre Community Center.

More details about Myron Ledbetter's life and research are contained in a second obituary that was also published in Newsday, on June 21, 2016:

Myron Calvert Ledbetter

1923 - 2016



LEDBETTER - Myron Calvert, died at his home in Belle Terre on June 1, at the age of ninety-two. He had been an active and well-known member of his community for many years.

Myron was born in Ardmore, Oklahoma on June 25, 1923, the son of the late Robert and Adeline Ledbetter. Myron was a freshman at Oklahoma State when World War II began. During the summer of 1942 he earned a commission as an ensign in the U.S. Navy and was assigned to LST 947. His ship was part of the invasion of Okinawa and occupation of Japan.

Upon his discharge Myron returned to Oklahoma to finish his studies in plant biology at Oklahoma State, then realizing he needed further education in his chosen field of plant biology, went to UC Berkeley for a Master's Degree.

Myron worked as a Research assistant at Boyce Thompson Institute in Yonkers, NY while pursuing his PhD work in botany at Columbia University. To further his specialized work on the plant cell research, Myron then went to Rockefeller Institute to work with Dr. Keith Porter to develop new techniques on the electron microscope. A year later to continue his research, he went to Harvard University with Dr. Porter's team. Working with the electron microscope, Myron and Dr. Porter published many new important findings, ultimately resulting in the publication of an atlas of plant cells "Introduction to the Fine Structure of Plant Cells."

Finally in 1965 Myron accepted a position as a cell biologist and ultimately senior cell biologist at Brookhaven National Laboratory where he stayed until his retirement in 1988. Myron was a highly respected cell biologist and well known for his work on the electron microscope. He and Dr. Porter published research in 1963 on the discovery of a new organelle in plant cells, the microtubule, which initiated a whole new area of plant cell biology research, a discovery so significant that fifty years later the July 2013 issue of the scientific journal "Plant Journal" devoted its entire issue to the importance of this finding.

Myron and another colleague Robert Dell invented a self-cleaning aperture to correct a problem with the electron microscope, a gadget which saved hours of down time of the microscope and is still widely in use.

Myron was elected as the president of the Electron Microscopy Society of America for 1978. That Society also

awarded him the Distinguished Scientist Award, Biological Sciences, for 1996.

Myron possessed a keen inquiring intellect and had a seemingly encyclopedic knowledge of and interest in many areas. He was particularly interested in social justice and human rights and established the Myron C Ledbetter Diversity Scholarship at Oklahoma State University. In 2000 he was given the OSU Distinguished Alumni Award.

Myron enjoyed theater and classical music, travel, reading, book discussion groups, entertaining and dining out. He and his life partner of over 55 years, John D'Aquila, who predeceased him in 2014, had been subscribing members of the Metropolitan Opera and the Roundabout Theater Company for many years. In Port Jefferson they particularly enjoyed Theatre Three.

Myron was a co-founder of OLLI (Osher Lifelong Learning Institute) at Stony Brook University and participated in many of its programs. He became interested in stained glass and created many beautiful imaginative pieces, some even based on his own microscopic plant cell enlargements. He was an active member of the memoirs group and continued as long as his health permitted.

Myron traveled extensively. He and John had friends everywhere, including the group with whom he served in WWII. In 2012 Myron and John were married, an event which gave great joy to their family and friends.

Myron was predeceased by his brother Robert. He is survived by a sister-in-law Marcia Ledbetter and by a

cousin Margaret Garland, and by many loving nieces and nephews and by a host of lifelong friends. Myron Ledbetter was a gracious and kind man and a thoughtful friend. He will be greatly missed. Memorial donations in Myron's name may be made to Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center, 1275 York Avenue, NY, NY 10065. Expressions of condolence may be sent to the Family of Myron C. Ledbetter c/o A celebration of Myron's life will be held on June 26, at the Belle Terre Community Center, Cliff Road at 11.00 am.