

Obituary: John Olness

John William Olness, who was a nuclear physicist with BNL's Tandem Van de Graaff facility for 37 years - from joining the Lab in 1963 until his retirement in 2000 - died on February 15, 2015. He was 85 years old.

His wife Margaret Olness shared the obituary that starts on the following page with *BREA News*:

John Olness

Local Stony Brook resident **John William Olness**, a distinguished nuclear physicist at Brookhaven National Laboratory, passed away on 15 February 2015.



John was born a US citizen in Saskatchewan, Canada, in 1929. The son of a science teacher, he received an A.B degree from St. Olaf College in 1951, with concentrations in chemistry, math and statistics. He obtained a Ph.D. in nuclear physics in 1957 from Duke University where he performed his thesis work with Harold Lewis and Willy Haerberli. He then took a research position at the Air Force Aeronautical Systems Division at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base in Dayton Ohio before moving to Brookhaven National Laboratory (BNL) in 1963.

At BNL, John first worked at the 3.5-MeV Van de Graaff accelerator and then continued his research at the new double Emperor-type Tandem Van de Graaff accelerator facility when it was completed in 1970. He and his collaborators developed innovative techniques to characterize the structure of light nuclei. He collaborated extensively with Ernest Warburton and they published over 50 papers together. Studies with the Van de Graaff focused on attaining a basic understanding of atomic nuclei by observing the decay schemes of nuclear energy levels and nuclear reactions.

John worked with many of the visiting scientists who came to BNL to use the facilities including Sir Denys Wilkinson (Oxford) and D. Allan Bromley (Yale, and later, science advisor to President George H.W. Bush). Bromley brought several Ph.D. students to conduct research on the Van de Graaff and work with John, including future Space Shuttle

astronaut Joseph Allen. Allen later presented the Laboratory with a copy of a paper (co-authored with John) that he carried with him while on the Space Shuttle Columbia. This paper is known as “the most widely circulated paper in the history of nuclear research” — having traveled more than two-million miles in space. The paper currently hangs in the lobby of the Tandem Van de Graaff at BNL.

John retired from Brookhaven National Laboratory in 2000.

John's interests were not limited to his scientific quests. He pursued a life-long passion for music, and he played trombone in a number of community bands, marching bands. John was also a founding member of “Memories of Swing,” a big-band based on Long Island. In Stony Brook, John was a Little League coach for several years, and also served two terms as a member of the local Three Village School Board in the 1970's; he was School Board Vice-President from 1975-1976.

John is survived by his wife Margaret Olness, and children Fredrick (& wife Gloria), Robert, Richard, Kristin and Christopher, and grandchildren Jonathan, Jacqueline, Benjamin, and Alexandra. His brother and sister-in-law, Drs. Robert and Delores Olness, also fellow Duke physics graduates, reside in Livermore, CA. He was predeceased by his sister Marian Farrar.

A memorial service will be held on Thursday 2 July 2015 at 4:30pm, with reception to follow. The service will be held at the Setauket Presbyterian Church, 5 Caroline Ave, E. Setauket, NY 11733. Further information at: (631) 751-2655.