

In Memory of Alan Thorndike

The Department of Atmospheric Sciences recently lost an influential member of our community. Alan Thorndike was a founding member of the Polar Science Center and helped establish the University of Washington as a premier institute for the study of polar climate.

Alan received his PhD from the University of Washington in 1978 with Professor Norbert Untersteiner. In the following years he served as a principal field scientist for the Arctic Ice Dynamics Joint Experiment (AIDJEX) - the first major field experiment designed to study the motion and deformation of Arctic sea ice. Alan is credited with developing the theory of the distribution of sea ice thickness. His pioneering work is used in state-of-the-art climate models to this day.

Alan's professional passion was teaching. He joined the University of Puget Sound as a professor in 1983 where he taught physics. He wrote books on classical mechanics and climate modeling, built an observatory, and mentored students in research projects. Alan's favorite research projects involved building instruments that demonstrate quantum mechanical phenomena, including quantum entanglement and the splitting of degenerate quantum states in the presence of a magnetic field. Alan was a fantastic teacher, and he preached the importance of curiosity and asking questions. His students remember him for starting every lecture with "Who has a question?"

Later in his career, Alan's research interests shifted to projects that involved many hours of work in the machine shop, where he was a master. Most notably, Alan built a replica of the Antikythera mechanism. This project included manually cutting and mounting dozens of interconnected gears. Alan's work led to new interpretations of the purpose of the Antikythera mechanism, and ultimately to our understanding of the scientific knowledge of the ancient Greeks.

Alan had a lifelong love of sailing wooden boats, and all of the care that they require. He kept a beautiful 1962 vintage 41 foot ketch called BlueWater. He often sailed with family, friends, and students in the waters of Puget Sound, the Strait of Juan de Fuca, the Haro Straits, and the Strait of Georgia.

Alan passed away on January 8, 2018. He was 72. In lieu of flowers, those interested are encouraged to donate to the American Parkinson's Disease Association or to do something kind for someone in need, as Alan so often did.

Full Obituary: <http://www.fhnfuneralhome.com/obituaries/Alan-Thorndike/#!/Obituary>

