

Dr. Kevin Charles Antony Burke, University of Houston professor of geology and tectonics (1929-2018)

Memorial written by Dr. Paul Mann



Dr. Kevin Burke, a world-renowned professor of geology and tectonics at the UH Department of Earth and Atmospheric Sciences since 1993, passed away at his home in Gloucester, Massachusetts on March 20, 2018. Kevin was born in 1929 and grew up in London, England where he received both his BS and PhD degrees in geology from the University of London in 1951 and 1953, respectively. His PhD study was a mapping and dating study of volcanic and plutonic rocks in the Donegal area of western Ireland. From 1953 to 1972 he held a series of geology positions in teaching and research that included postings in Gold Coast, Ghana, Ireland, the UK, Korea, Jamaica, and Nigeria. A critical junction in his career occurred in 1972-3 when he became visiting professor at the University of Toronto where he became a close associate and mentee of Dr. J. Tuzo Wilson, who was one of the most prominent proponents of plate tectonics and hotspot studies at that time. During his time in Toronto with Wilson, Kevin began a lifelong study of hotspots, rifting, and mantle processes which was enhanced by his previous field experiences in Africa and the Caribbean. In 1973, he was invited by Dr. John Dewey to join a faculty at the State University of New York at Albany which had assembled a distinguished group of geoscientists interested in the fledgling areas of plate tectonics, hotspot studies, rifting, and field-based ophiolite studies. During his ten year residence in Albany, Kevin produced many seminal papers on continental rifting, hotspots, Caribbean tectonics, and the effects of continental collision in Asia and other continental interiors. During this period at SUNY he mentored two current EAS professors: Jack Casey and Paul Mann in studies of the Newfoundland ophiolites and Caribbean, respectively.

In 1983 he joined the faculty of the University of Houston and also worked as director and associate director of the Lunar and Planetary Institute at NASA in Houston until 1988. In the 1990s and 2000s, he in addition to mentoring grad students and teaching at UH, he held many visiting professorships at NASA, JPL, UCLA, Carnegie Institute, Oslo, South Africa and served on many national committees including the National Research Council, NASA, and the National Academy of Sciences. His lifetime achievement awards include the GSA Structure and Tectonics Career Award (2004), the GSA Penrose medal, the highest award of GSA (2007), and the Arthur Holmes medal, one of the most prestigious awards of the European Geosciences Union (2013). Kevin is survived by two sons and his daughter and grandson. His wife Angela passed away in 2016. Kevin was one of the greatest proponents of plate tectonics and mantle processes in a career that extended over seven decades and influenced multiple generations of geoscientists on many continents. With Kevin's passing, a great life force has gone out but his spirit will live on in all of us that he has inspired.