Jan. 17, 2019

Memorial set for Feb. 3 for MSU scientist, engineer, educator, entrepreneur, and friend Kris Berglund

A celebration of the life and legacy of Kris Arvid Berglund, University Distinguished Professor of Chemical Engineering and Food Science at Michigan State University, and professor of Biochemical Process Engineering at Luleå University of Technology (LTU), Luleå, Sweden, is planned for Sunday, Feb. 3, at 4 p.m. in the MSU Student Union Ballroom.

Berglund was a leading researcher in crystallization processes, alternative uses of agricultural and forest materials, and a trail blazer in fermentation and distilled beverage technologies. He died Dec. 12, 2018, in Okemos, Michigan.

He was born May 24, 1955, in Danville, Illinois, to Bonnie and Delmar Berglund of Rossville, Illinois. He was raised on his family's farm outside of Champaign-Urbana. He received a bachelor’s degree in agricultural engineering from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign in 1977, a master’s in chemical engineering from Colorado State University in 1980, and a doctorate in chemical engineering from Iowa State University in 1981.

His began his career as an assistant professor of chemical engineering at Iowa State University in 1981, then joined MSU in 1984 as an assistant professor of both agricultural and chemical engineering. He rose quickly to associate professor in 1986, and full professor in 1990. He also directed one of the original MSU Research Excellence Funds Centers, the Crop and Food Bioprocessing Center, from 1989 to 1999. He was among the very few MSU faculty members to hold two professorships concurrently, serving as a professor of biochemical process engineering at LTU since 2002.

His prolific career included publication of numerous papers in scientific journals and a book, Artisan Distilling, an authoritative volume in the field. He was awarded 20 patents for his research that included new methods to produce low-emission fuels, succinic acid, windshield washer and deicer, and a sodium-free salt substitute. He was widely sought-after as a public speaker and industry consultant to major food and chemical companies.

He was proud of the 48 doctoral and master’s students he trained at MSU and LTU. His remarkable legacy in education included teaching 21 different courses at these institutions.
Berglund was named a Fulbright Scholar in 1987 (in the Netherlands). In 1998, he received the MSU Distinguished Faculty Award and was bestowed the title of University Distinguished Professor. His research and teaching achievements were also recognized with prestigious awards by Colorado State University, Iowa State University, and the University of Illinois.

Berglund was an early adapter to the concept of entrepreneurship and worked to reduce the obstacles that entrepreneurs face in a university setting. His entrepreneurial efforts at LEC Tech, Inc./ Diversified Natural Products gave him business development insight to share with students, especially in design classes. He set up the Artisan Distilling Company and conducted workshops for entrepreneurs around the world to fund training for students in real-scale beverage distillation. He developed a unique series of classes at MSU to teach students fermented beverage technology and created a minor in fermented beverages at MSU that numerous students have completed. This educational program is unique in the United States. Many of his former students are leaders in the wine, beer, and spirits industries.

Berglund was fondly known as the “Godfather” of Michigan’s distilling industry. He worked to change state laws to legalize small distilleries, then began hosting workshops to teach others how to produce spirits.

David Miller, MSU alumni (’97, PhD, horticulture) and owner of White Pines Winery, said “Kris was the driving force behind the boutique distilling industry in Michigan and the eastern U.S. The distillation industry in our state would not exist in its present form without Kris's efforts.”

Since 2013, Berglund and his wife, Dianne Holman, have been co-owners of Red Cedar Spirits, an East Lansing distillery managed by Dianne. She continues to run the distillery. He also served on the Meridian Township Board.

Read more on his life at: Kris Arvid Berglund.

Related Website: Communications contact: Patricia Mroczek

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