In Memoriam

Michael T. Ryan 1952–2020

MICHAEL T. RYAN, Ph.D., Editor-in-Chief of Health Physics from 2000–2017, passed away following a battle with Alzheimer’s disease on 22 February 2020. He was the younger of two sons of Edward P. and Melissa M. (McKinney) Ryan of Worcester, MA.

Mike was educated in the public and parochial schools of Worcester. He graduated from St. John’s High School in Shrewsbury, MA, in 1970, hoping to pursue a career in engineering. He enrolled at Lowell Technological Institute (LTI) in Lowell, MA, along with his friend Bob Misiewicz, with that goal in mind. But in 1971, toward the end of his freshman year, he met professors Ken Skrable, Ed Alexander, and George Chabot and learned about a new program that would subsidize much of his bachelor’s degree and virtually guarantee him employment when he graduated. Mike and fellow classmates Clay French, John Vento, Manuel Jiminez, Mark Ragozzino, and others were all intrigued by that prospect and joined the inaugural class of the new program in a field called radiological health physics. The supporting grant was with the FDA’s Bureau of Radiological Health. Although Mike didn’t know much about rad health at the time, he jumped at the opportunity to obtain his degree without having to worry about how much it would cost. So, Mike Ryan embarked on an exciting adventure that changed the course of his life.

After completing his bachelor’s degree in 1974, Mike decided to continue his education and pursue his master’s degree at UMass Lowell (formerly LTI) with full support from a fellowship with the US Energy Research and Development Administration (ERDA), now known as the US Department of Energy. For the next two summers, he was a student intern in the Chemical Separations Group at Oak
Fred Haywood, Woody Cottrell, in the FUSRAP program. Along with and section chief, transitioned to the Health & Safety Research Division. Un-

Forrest Sealey, Ridge National Laboratory. Again, he didn’t know much about the techniques involved in chemical separations but the importance of their work in the bigger picture of the field of radiological health physics as a whole. At the same time, Phil Arwood introduced him to ORNL and life in East Tennessee. Mike left UMass Lowell in 1976 with his master’s degree in hand and his new bride Mary Gene at his side and headed for Oak Ridge, TN, hooked on health physics.

Mike began his professional career in September 1976 in ORNL’s Chemical Technologies Division and soon transitioned to the Health & Safety Research Division. Under the tutelage of the Division Director, John A. Auxier, and section chief, Donald G. Jacobs, he began working in the FUSRAP program. Along with Howard Dickson, Fred Haywood, Woody Cottrell, and Rick Doane, Mike traveled around the US to visit former Manhattan Project private sector research and production facilities to identify, investigate, and clean up or control radiological and chemical contamination that remained at those sites.

When the opportunity arose for him to take a leave of absence from ORNL to earn his doctorate at the Georgia Institute of Technology, Mike was excited to pursue that next important milestone. His professors there— Karl Z. Morgan, Geoffrey G. Eichholz, Melvin Carter, and John W. Poston, Sr.—taught him all they knew about health physics, and when he completed his coursework there in late 1978, Mike returned to ORNL ready to complete his experimental work and write his dissertation. His work was focused on the translocation of $^{238}$Pu and $^{239}$Pu through a membrane of lung fluid simulant to try to mimic the kinetic behavior of the different isotopes of plutonium observed in experimental animals. That piqued Mike’s interest in internal dosimetry and led him to the Health Physics and Industrial Safety Division at ORNL, where he worked with John Auxier, Howard Dickson, Lou Henley, and Carol Berger, among others, on whole-body counting and a variety of health physics issues. He also participated with Stephen Musolino of Brookhaven National Laboratory in two whole-body counting field parties in 1981 and 1982 with the US Department of Energy’s Marshall Islands Radiological Safety Program (Fig. 1).

When Mike completed his Ph.D. in 1982, his career took off in a new direction. He accepted a position as Laboratory Director at Chem-Nuclear Systems, Inc., and he and Mary Gene moved to South Carolina in 1983. He worked with a host of people there, including Vernon Ichimura, David Ebbenhack, Bill House, John Bucur, Walt Newcomb, Bob Meyer, and Vic Barnhart, all of Chem-Nuclear Systems, Inc.; Don Fowler of Fowler Communications; and Pearse O’Kelley of the South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control, among others. With their help, Mike became an expert in the area of low-level waste management and also earned graduate certificates in business from the University of Virginia Darden School of Business, the Wharton School of Executive Education at the University of Pennsylvania, and the J.J. Kellogg Graduate School of Management at Northwestern University. He left Chem-Nuclear in 1996 as Vice President of Barnwell Operations.

The combination of Mike’s expertise in health physics, internal dosimetry, waste management, and business opened up more new career paths. After 15 y with Chem-Nuclear Systems, Inc., Mike accepted a position as a faculty member at the Medical University of South Carolina, where he taught courses in radiological health and business. He also served as an adjunct faculty member at Vanderbilt University in Nashville, TN; Texas A&M University in College Station, TX; the University of South Carolina in Columbia, SC; and the College of Charleston and Charleston Southern University in Charleston, SC.

Mike also became a consultant in the areas of waste management and internal dosimetry that took him to places all around the globe. He worked with a number of national corporations and government agencies performing work in the fields of radioactive waste management, radiological health, and regulatory compliance for workplace and environmental issues. He was a member of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) mission to Fukushima to provide assistance in the use of radiation monitoring data to develop maps to be made available to the public. He served for several years on the independent review panel for decommissioning work at Brookhaven National Laboratory. He was Chairman of the External Advisory Board for Radiation Protection at Sandia National Laboratories and was a member of a similar external review board for Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory. He served on the Scientific Review Group appointed by the US Assistant Secretary of Energy to review the ongoing research in
health effects at the former Russian weapons complex sites in the Southern Urals. In addition, he served on several Committees of the National Academy of Sciences, producing reports regarding radioactive waste management. He was a member of two Advisory Committees (and chairman of the Advisory Committee on Nuclear Waste) to the US Nuclear Regulatory Commission in Washington, DC, for 17 y. He also served on the Technical Advisory Radiation Control Council for the State of South Carolina for 19 y. The people he worked with during that time included Barry Fountos of the US Department of Energy, Sergey Romanov of SUBI in Russia, Yuiko Ono of Mitsubishi Materials Corp. in Japan, and Kevin O’Donoghue of the Radiation Policy Section in the Republic of Ireland (Figs. 2, 3, and 4).

Mike received many awards during his career, including the Distinguished Alumni Award at St. John’s High School; the Francis Cabot Lowell Distinguished Alumni for Arts and Sciences Award from the University of Massachusetts Lowell; the Academy of Distinguished Alumni at Georgia Institute of Technology; the Health Physics Society’s Elda E. Anderson Award; the Failla

Fig. 2. In Russia.

Fig. 3. Rad Waste Storage – Chem-Nuclear Systems, Inc.

Fig. 4. HPS Sweatshirt Model.
Award from the New York Chapter of the Health Physics Society at New York University; the Distinguished Public Service Award from the Health Physics Society; and the Hodes Award from the Southeast Compact Commission. He was a distinguished emeritus member of the National Council of Radiation Protection and Measurements (NCRP) and was a certified health physicist.

One of the highlights of Mike’s life was his involvement in the Health Physics Society. Mike first became a member as a student in 1974. Over the years, he was awarded the Elda E. Anderson Award in 1989, was named a Fellow of the HPS in 2005, served as the first president of the Waste Management Section of the HPS, was president of the Savannah River Chapter, served as the Book Editor for Health Physics, was a member of the HPS Editorial Board for many years, and was awarded the Distinguished Public Service Award in 2017. He took pride in collaborating with both Dick and Brett Burk and all at Burk and Associates, along with fellow health physicists who became fast friends, such as Craig Little, Ed Bailey, Tracy Ikenberry, Gen Roessler, Darrell Fisher, and Naomi Harley, just to name a few (Figs. 5, 6, and 7).

One of the things of which Mike was most proud in his career was his position as editor-in-chief of Health Physics, a job he held for 17 y. He truly enjoyed working with authors at all stages—from young health physicists writing their first papers to seasoned professionals—to help develop the catalog of research in health physics upon which future scientists can rely for quality scientific information. He was resolute in his commitment to the scientific integrity of the Journal and leadership of the Editorial Board to uphold his vision. He considered it an honor to be counted among those who have held the editor-in-chief position, including K.Z. Morgan, Wade Patterson, Genevieve Roessler, Richard Vetter, Kenneth Mossman, Kenneth Miller, and currently Brant Ulsh. The job was truly a “labor of love,” as he put it many times. He and John W. Poston, Sr. worked with their peers Jim Turner, Gus Potter, Paul Frame, Ken Miller, Rich Vetter, Dade Moeller, Ron Kathren, and Allen Brodsky, among others, to develop a “50th Anniversary Edition” of the Journal that chronicles the first 50 y of research and study in the burgeoning field of health physics. In his acceptance speech for the Failla Award in 2009, Mike said, “I’m very proud of that [50th Anniversary] issue. I hope it serves many generations when we’re gone so that they can understand the first 50 y of health physics and figure out what we did and why we did it.”

Throughout his career, Mike made it a point to speak to and inspire countless young people about how he got involved in health physics and what a wonderful and interesting life he had as a result. He left them with two pieces of advice: First, no matter what field you are in, always do the right thing; and second, if you want the chance to go to interesting places and do new things, raise your hand and volunteer. You never know what might come from those
new experiences. He also counseled them to seek help from those who preceded them and have valuable experience to share. Those people—who were for Mike the persons whose names appear in bold in this article—can serve as invaluable resources upon which they can build their careers and make their own mark on their profession.

While Mike loved working, like any good Irishman, he also enjoyed just relaxing with friends and having a good time. He had a wicked sense of humor that became sharper given enough whiskey and a good audience. He will be missed at the HPS annual meetings where he often “held court” in the lobby bar, interacting with his fellow members and telling (or re-telling) his store of jokes and stories.

Mike leaves his wife of 43 y, Mary Gene, Managing Editor of HPJ; his brother Ed, an attorney in Massachusetts; 16 nieces and nephews; five grand-nieces and grand-nephews; and a host of friends all over the world (Fig. 8).

Not too bad for a kid from Worcester. As he often quoted Kurt Vonnegut, “And so it goes.”

Mary Gene Ryan
Shrewsbury, MA

Stephen V. Musolino
Bellport, Long Island, NY

Howard W. Dickson
Tampa, FL

Clayton S. French
Dracut, MA

Fig. 8. In Sedona, AZ, with Mary Gene.