

Biochemist Marlene DeLuca dies

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BIOCHEMIST MARLENE DE LUCA DIES

Dr. Marlene DeLuca, a pioneer in the field of bioluminescence research and wife of former University of California, San Diego Chancellor William D. McElroy, died Wednesday night (Nov. 18) of cancer at Scripps Memorial Hospital in La Jolla.

DeLuca, 51, had been a member of the UCSD chemistry department since 1972. She was perhaps best known for her research, along with her husband, into bioluminescence, and recently made headlines worldwide when her team of investigators introduced the gene which lights up fireflies into a tobacco plant.

"It is a great loss to the scientific community, and personally devastating as far as I'm concerned," said McElroy, her husband of 20 years. "She was a wonderful lady, both in science and in having fun."

She is also survived by a son, Eric, 19.

"I, and all of her colleagues at UCSD are deeply saddened by Marlene DeLuca's death," said UCSD Chancellor Richard C. Atkinson. "She was an outstanding scientist whose recent work has been highly acclaimed as both innovative and invaluable to her field.

"A gifted teacher, her legacy will also live on in the numerous students she has inspired," Atkinson continued. "More importantly, she was an exceptional human being whose lively intellect and personal charm were always evident and will be greatly missed."

Edward Dennis, chairman of the UCSD Academic Senate and a colleague in the chemistry department added: "She was a devoted scientist and teacher who made major contributions to understanding the biochemical basis of how fireflies light. She was a dedicated and skilled individual who will be sorely missed by students and faculty alike."

Before coming to UCSD, DeLuca, a native of LaCrosse, Wisconsin, was an assistant professor in the Department of Biochemistry at Georgetown University Medical School. From 1967 to 1970 she served as assistant professor in the Department of Biology and as a National Institutes of Health Career Development Awardee at Johns Hopkins University, where she had been a postdoctoral fellow from 1963 until 1966.

She earned her B.S. degree from Hamline University in St. Paul, Minnesota, and her Ph.D. from the University of Minnesota in 1962.

She was a member of the American Chemical Society, Sigma Xi, and the American Society of Biological Chemists. From 1978 until 1980 she served as a member of the Science Advisory Board for the Environmental Protection Agency.

It was almost exactly one year ago that DeLuca and her colleagues, UCSD molecular geneticist Donald R. Helinski, plant biologist Stephen H. Howell, UCSD post-doctoral fellow David W. Ow and graduate students Keith V. Wood and Jeffrey R. de Wet announced in Science Magazine that they had transferred the gene which makes fireflies glow into plants. "This is the first time anyone has taken a gene that codes for light production and transferred it into the genetic material of a complex multi-cellular organism," Helinski said at the time.

DeLuca will be cremated. A memorial service will be held Saturday, Nov. 21, at 2 p.m. in Garren Auditorium in the Basic Science Building at the School of Medicine. Dr. McElroy asked that in lieu of flowers, donations be made payable to the UCSD

Foundation for a scholarship or lectureship fund in the Department of Chemistry in her honor. Address donations to Pat Rule (B-032), UCSD, La Jolla, CA 92093.

*Cremation by Balboa Cremation Services, 563-8810.

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