

Obituary Notice Climate Forecast Innovator John Roads

A key player in the rise of climate studies at Scripps, Roads developed fire weather forecasts and advanced climate prediction capabilities

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John Roads, one of a generation of climate researchers at Scripps Institution of Oceanography at UC San Diego who took long-range climate prediction capability to new levels of sophistication, died following a two-year battle with leukemia on June 21, 2008, at UCSD's Thornton Hospital. He was 58 years old.

A research meteorologist, Roads directed the Experimental Climate Prediction Center (ECPC) at Scripps, which develops computational methodologies for predicting climate over long periods of time for a range of users including the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. He had taken over the program in 1986 from Jerome Namais, the founder of the Climate Research Group at Scripps whose success in recruiting talent and mentoring students is credited for developing one of the world's leading climate research programs.

"John was wonderful to work with," said Tim Barnett, a research marine physicist at Scripps. "He had imagination and an enthusiasm that sparked the entire climate effort at Scripps. He was always positive about what could be done."

Roads graduated with honors from the University of Colorado, Boulder, in 1972, having majored in physics. He joined Scripps in 1977 as a postgraduate researcher after having received his Ph.D. in meteorology from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology that year. As a student of influential meteorology professor Ed Lorenz, Roads produced his doctoral thesis "Numerical Experiments on the Sensitivity of an Atmospheric Hydrologic Cycle to the Equilibrium Temperature." He would pursue the concepts outlined in that thesis for much of his research career.

"He was one of the mainstream meteorologists who was working hard to bridge hydrology and meteorology in the international community," said Scripps climate researcher Masao Kanamitsu. "I feel his experience and interest initiated during his Ph.D. years blossomed."

In November 1977, Roads became an assistant research meteorologist at Scripps. In addition to leading the ECPC, he led a variety of fire weather studies aimed at providing prediction tools to the U.S. Forest Service and other users. Roads also was involved with the Global Energy and Water Cycle Experiment, a World Meteorological Organization project to understand and model the global water cycle.

"He enjoyed work, but he also loved beer, movies, swimming, driving, and travel. He was a good boss to the people who worked under him," said Kanamitsu. "Lastly, he was a very strong person, who never complained during his long battle with leukemia. I miss him very much."

Roads is survived by his daughter Emily, Emily's mother Lori, wife Elena Orlova, stepdaughter Katherine, parents Grace and Paul, and siblings Paul Jr., Nancy, Cynthia, Marilyn and Carol.

Services will be held Friday, June 27, at 11 a.m. at the Church at Rancho Bernardo, 11740 Bernardo Plaza Court, San Diego, Calif., 92128.

In lieu of flowers the family requests donations to the John Roads Memorial Scholarship Fund, which will enable Scripps Oceanography graduate students to attend climate science conferences. Donations should be made to UC Regents and should reference the John Roads Memorial Scholarship fund. Checks can be sent to Scripps Institution of Oceanography, UC San Diego, 9500 Gilman Dr., # 0210, La Jolla, CA 92093-0210.

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