

# **Resolution on the Death of Professor Robert (Bob) P. Guertin**

September 30, 2009

The Department of Physics and Astronomy and the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences invites the Arts, Sciences and Engineering faculty to join us in remembering our friend and colleague Bob Guertin, Professor of Physics and former Dean of the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, the Boston School of Occupational Therapy, the College of Special Studies, and of Research and Continuing Education, who died of cancer on June 12, 2009.

Born in Trenton, New Jersey in 1939, and raised in Winnetka, Illinois, Bob was educated at Trinity College in Hartford, Wesleyan University and the University of Rochester before joining the Tufts faculty in 1968. He spent his entire academic career at Tufts, but his research took him to the Francis Bitter National Magnet Laboratory at MIT and its successor, the National High Magnetic Field Laboratory at Florida State University, as well as Los Alamos National Laboratory and the University of California, San Diego. His ability to identify scientific questions that were both important and tractable, his leadership and interpersonal skills, and his remarkable energy led to long and productive collaborations with numerous distinguished scientists, including Simon Foner, Jack Crow, Brian Maple and Zachary Fisk.

As a researcher, Bob was drawn to extremes. He specialized in measuring the properties of exotic materials in the highest magnetic fields, at the highest pressures, and at the lowest temperatures – often all three at once. He authored more than 130 refereed publications. His experiments frequently provided stringent tests of prevailing theories relating to the properties of materials, such as superconductors, in which the electrons, rather than behaving as independent particles, are highly correlated. His research on high-temperature superconductors, for example, tested competing theories of the effects of impurities on superconducting behavior, and helped identify the unconventional nature of the superconducting state in these exotic and important materials.

But Bob's love of extremes did not extend beyond the laboratory. As a teacher, mentor, colleague and friend, he was a model of equanimity, modesty, good judgment, generosity and good, though not always printable, humor. While he took his work very seriously, especially his research and work with students and younger colleagues, he could also look at the world – physics, teaching, Tufts, politics, the Red Sox – with “a mischievous twinkle in his eye,” as a colleague put it. After dealing with a complaining student, an unreasonable review of a paper, an aggravating faculty meeting, or a challenging physics problem, the best place to go was the couch in Bob's office – though it was occupied so steadily by students and colleagues seeking advice or just repartee that there was sometimes a wait. Whatever the annoyance or complexity, Bob's combination of careful thought and sense of humor always put it in perspective. No wonder, as

President Larry Bacow put it, “there were few people who ever worked at Tufts who were as beloved and respected as he was.”

He served eleven years as Dean of the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, enhancing its size and stature through his good judgment, leadership and organizational abilities, and commitment to outstanding education and first-rate research. He was a passionate advocate for students and the driving force behind the 89,000-square-foot Tufts University Science and Technology Center, a multi-discipline research center. He involved himself in every detail from securing funding through its design and construction. The flourishing research environment at this well-engineered and versatile structure is a testament to his vision and energy.

Somehow amidst his active research and administrative responsibilities he found time to serve on numerous NSF panels, external review boards, conference organizing committees, and as Chair of the Board of Governors of the University Press New England. He just had too much to give for Tufts to absorb it all, though we tried our best.

Bob was devoted to his wife June, daughters Lynn Kirby and Laura Impemba, brother Tom, and four grandsons. A classical music aficionado, he was a talented pianist, member of the Harvard Music Association, and longtime subscriber to the BSO, where he maintained the same first-balcony seat for over thirty years. Among his other great loves were his annual vacations on Nantucket and the many dogs of his Back Bay neighborhood, all of whom he knew by name.

In his last few months, as his health began to fail and his growing pain was apparent, he devoted much of his remaining strength to teaching his class in Classical Mechanics – he was determined not to let his students down. Equally important to him was not to be a burden on the department or his colleagues. To the very end he was always thinking of others and devoted to physics, to Tufts, and to all the people who had come to love and depend upon him for selfless service and gentle wisdom.

Donations in his memory can be made to the Graduate Student Research Fund, c/o Tufts University, Ballou Hall, First Floor, Medford, MA 02155.

*We ask that this resolution be included in the minutes of the faculty of Arts, Sciences and Engineering, and that copies be sent to Professor Guertin’s widow and children.*