



**Robert K. Boeckman, Jr.**  
**1944 – 2021**

Robert K. Boeckman, Jr., Marshall D. Gates Emeritus Professor of Chemistry at the University of Rochester, died on September 5, 2021 from complications of non-alcoholic steatohepatitis (NASH). Bob is survived by Mary Delton, his wife of 45 years.

Bob had been active in *Organic Syntheses* for more than three decades. He joined the Board of Editors in 1988, edited Volume 73 in 1996, and became a member of the Board of Directors in 2001. Bob served as President of Organic Syntheses, Inc. from 2012 until his death in 2021. The organization thrived under Bob's leadership with net worth and expenditures for programs in support of organic chemistry increasing by fifty percent.

Bob was born on August 26, 1944 in Pasadena, CA while his father was stationed there during WWII. He grew up in Dayton, OH where his parents continued operation of the popular Boeckman family butcher shop business. After his B.S. degree from Carnegie Institute of Technology he went to Brandeis University and completed his Ph.D. in 1970 mentored by James Hendrickson and Ernest Grunwald. After postdoctoral finishing school with Gilbert Stork at Columbia University, in 1972 he began his academic career as an Assistant Professor at Wayne State University. He quickly advanced through the ranks becoming full Professor there in 1979. In 1980 Andy Kende persuaded him to move to the University of Rochester where he spent the next four decades. He became the Marshall D. Gates Professor in 2002 and served as chair of the department from 2003 to 2013 before retiring from the

University in July 2019. Bob's research efforts focused on the development of new synthetic methodology, including asymmetric synthesis, applicable to the synthesis of complex multifunctional target structures including biologically significant natural products. He and his coworkers developed innovative total syntheses of a number of complex natural products, with particularly notable and pioneering contributions in the area of sesterterpene and alkaloid synthesis. Included among his many conquests were gascardic acid, (+/-)-pleuromutilin, (+/-)-ceroplastol, (+/-)-tirandamycin A, (-)-nakadomarin A, (+)-ikarugamycin, (+)-tetronolide, (+)-laurenyne, and (+) and (-)-saudin. After retirement he continued with a medicinal chemistry project involving bisphosphonates and bisphosphonate drug conjugates. His work resulted in more than 150 publications. To the University of Rochester, Bob bequeathed endowment for the Robert K. Boeckman Jr and Mary H. Delton Family Distinguished Professorship in Organic Chemistry.

In a scenario engineered by Hans and Ieva Reich, Bob met his wife Mary Delton at a chemistry conference in Kingston, Jamaica in January 1976. They were married the following June. Bob and Mary shared loves of science, horses, cats, and nature. Upon Bob's retirement Bob, Mary, favorite horses and cats moved from their horse farm in Honeoye Falls, NY outside of Rochester to a home of their design complete with a horse barn and riding trails in the Adirondacks. Trees on the property provided for a semi-commercial production of maple syrup. Bob was a long-term supporter and recent President of Pet Pride of New York, Inc., a no-kill, cats only, sanctuary and adoption center; the organization truly prospered under his leadership.

Bob served as an Associate Editor of the *Journal of Organic Chemistry* from 1997 until 2016. He served as Chair of the ACS Division of Organic Chemistry in 2001. He was an inaugural American Chemical Society Fellow and was also a Fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science and the Japanese Society for the Promotion of Science. Among Bob's other honors are an A.P. Sloan Fellowship, a Research Career Development Award from the National Institutes of Health, and an ACS Cope Scholar Award. He was twice awarded the Alexander Von Humboldt Stiftung Research Prize for Senior Scientists. At Rochester, he received the William H. Riker University Award for graduate teaching in 2009. Bob served for many years as a consultant to Novartis and a variety of other pharmaceutical companies

Bob achieved remarkable balance in his life. He was internationally recognized for his creative contributions to the art and practice of organic syntheses. He was exemplary in his service to his department, to his university, to his profession and to society. He was a praiseworthy teacher at all levels from large undergraduate classes to one-on-one with members of his research group. He was a steadfast supporter of his faculty colleagues and students and postdocs from his group. Bob had an extensive collection of sweater vests – constantly wearing them was a source of comfort for Bob and amusement for his wife, colleagues and students. He made time to enjoy his personal life – their horses, their cats, nature, good food, fine wine and great investments. He was a caring and responsive friend. He is profoundly missed.

Carl R. Johnson