Although Bob's life had come to a tragic end just days earlier, the crowd that came together for his memorial service was there to be a part of the send-off for a beloved family member and friend. Bob was a man that was a truly gifted teacher and scientist as well as a visionary scholar. Possibly the greatest of his many talents was his ability to nurture the best in those with whom he worked, whether at home, in the office, at the shop, in the field or at sea.

A native of Savannah, Georgia, Bob's professional and personal interests knew no geographic boundaries. His formal education began in Georgia; his B.S. in Geology was earned from Mississippi State University; his M.S., the Geology of Clark County, Ga. and Ph. D., in geology with emphasis in Marine Processes, came from the University of Georgia. He served as a Reserve Officer and Aviator for the U.S. Navy,

Placer recovery was one of Bob’s lifelong passions, whether in a Georgia stream, an Amazonian jungle or the ancient reefs of southeast Asia.
working primarily with anti-submarine and mine warfare. He studied Ocean Science and Engineering at the Naval Post Graduate School, Monterey, CA.

Prior to joining the School of Engineering at the University of Mississippi in 1980, Bob worked as a contractor in industry and with the United Nations, specializing in marine mineral exploration, mining and related environmental engineering. His work mainly involved marine placer deposits and environmental issues related to marine and fluvial, alluvial dredging for industrial and precious minerals in North and South America, the Mediterranean, West Africa, Southeast Asia and the South Pacific. It was during his time working on a United Nations project in Myanmar (then Burma), that he married Georgia native Maxine Upson while on leave in Singapore.

As Director of the Mississippi Mineral Resources Institute (MMRI), Bob worked mainly with energy and industrial minerals. He guided the Institute toward the responsible development of the state's mineral resources, providing lawmakers with the data necessary to make informed decisions regarding its future. His achievements ranged from plant microbial filter design to drills and dredges. For his cooperative work in acoustic filter design, Bob was awarded an honorary Ph. D. from the Moscow Mining Institute. More recently, he had been guiding efforts to produce biodiesel from cooking oil and other plant sources to power MMRI's equipment and vehicles.

While at MMRI, Bob's responsibilities were expanded with the establishment of the Department of the Interior's Minerals Management Service's Center for Marine Resources and Environmental Technology (CMRET) and NOAA's Seabed Technology Research Center (STRC) programs. These centers were developed primarily to conduct projects of research and investigation of offshore energy/mineral resources and related environmental studies. The STRC and CMRET have served both industry and
government agencies in providing scientific and technical council and assistance to various mineral resource and environmental programs throughout the U.S. Exclusive Economic Zone, with primary focus on the Gulf of Mexico.

In the late 1990s, Bob became interested in gas hydrates: how they had come to be where they are, why they are not other places, the dynamics of their formation and dissociation. Finding others with similar interests was something at which Bob excelled and The Gulf of Mexico Hydrates Research Consortium was the result of his drive to get hydrates research moving in the Gulf. Efforts of the Consortium are focused on research and development of new ocean observing and survey systems, technologies, and methodologies for use in gas hydrate research. Funding for Consortium projects comes from the Departments of the Interior, Energy and Commerce.

Since the Consortium's inception in 1999, there have been hundreds of members and about 30 actively involved in Consortium-funded hydrates research at any given time. Bob was instrumental in securing federal funding for the Consortium largely because he was passionate as well as knowledgeable about every aspect of the project. He was proud of every achievement and especially proud of the students whose innovation he fueled with his own enthusiasm and encouragement. He never tired of making opportunities for new research and researchers, always making room in his own repertoire for new ideas, new approaches to problems, innovative solutions.

Bob was indeed a classroom professor but his real teaching talent came to the fore when he was in the field. He was always looking to get outside – to get going, to get to the outcrop, to get the ship moving, to find out more about why things were the way they were – to know more about them. With a love for both geology and people, Bob immersed himself in the local geology as well as local people. He always left a project knowing more about the people and the place. He never tired of collecting stories and those who knew him know that he loved to tell stories – and that he had an impressive trove of them. That's partly because in addition to being a gifted storyteller, he was a gifted listener. This trait endeared him to his students and kept him a student his entire life. Whether it was in the local climes of Mississippi or Georgia, or far off places like Alaska, Belize, Brazil, Burma, the Congo, Ghana, Nova Scotia, or Russia, Bob had a story appropriate to the locale. He would often take more stories home, collected from the locals, co-workers, co-travelers.

“He was an old-style geologist, the kind
that is hard to find these days; his experiences took him around the world, and because of his broad range of expertise, he could talk with anybody,” said Terry Panhorst, University of Mississippi Associate Professor of Geology.

More than anything, Bob wanted to know more about you. He was a most talented mentor and would talk you through a problem or a project and draw more out of you than you thought you had. Before you knew it, you had defined your immediate objective and you had a plan to reach it.

Jesse Hunt, who has known Bob since they were in graduate school together at the University of Georgia in the mid-1960s, puts it this way, “He was an incredible person. There wasn't anything he couldn't do. I've never met anyone more knowledgeable and flexible than Bob. He touched thousands of people and I've never heard anybody say a bad word about him.”

Going to the field or to sea with Bob was like a holiday and a homecoming at the same time. You would never work harder than with Bob, you would never be asked to do anything he wasn't willing or able to do himself but you would have the opportunity to pursue your own investigations and you could count on his support and input. When the job was done, you were proud that you were part of a team that could be counted on to do the best job possible under the circumstances. "He had an extraordinary ability in bringing people together to address important problems," said Alice Clark, University of Mississippi vice chancellor for research and sponsored programs. "It was obvious to all who knew him that he loved his work and the people he worked with. He was a delightful man who will be deeply missed."

Memorial contributions can be made to the J.R. Woolsey Geology and Geological Engineering Memorial Scholarship, c/o University of Mississippi Foundation, P.O. Box 249, University, MS 38677.

HOW TO CONTACT US

MMRI, 310 Lester Hall
University, MS 38677
Phone : (662) 915-7320
Fax: (662) 915-5625

E-Mail: inst@olemiss.edu

Web Page: http://www.olemiss.edu/depts/mmri/