An Appreciation

Arthur Newcombe Bourns
President Emeritus, McMaster University and Honorary President, MURA

Dr. Arthur Bourns served the McMaster University community in the widest range of responsibilities. His contributions to students, faculty, staff, and the University as a whole affected more people than most others ever have the opportunity to influence. Dr. Bourns joined the Chemistry Department as Assistant Professor in 1947 and, during the following 31 years, demonstrated those principles of integrity and service that followed him into the President’s Office.

Dr. Bourns passed away recently at 95-and-a-half years of a distinguished life during which he impacted significantly on not only the University and its students but through his associations and responsibilities with Provincial and Federal agencies. His obituary, which cited the extensive list of his dedication and career accomplishments, can be found on-line at http://goo.gl/z3z0k4. He was honoured as Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada, Fellow of The Chemical Institute of Canada, by five universities with the LL.D., and by his country as Officer of the Order of Canada. He was also very proud that MURA appointed him Honorary President.

He served as Chairman of his department, Dean of Graduate Studies, and Vice-President, Science and Engineering prior to being named President. In the words of Dr. Peter George, President Emeritus, at the Celebration of Arthur Bourns’ life, Dr. Bourns was a “visionary, yet completely approachable, earning the trust of the community by being open to suggestion, available to colleagues, and willing to consider alternative viewpoints. He opened up the decision-making processes to collegial and student participation because he thought it would add value to the University’s decision-making outcomes.”

Dr. George went on to say, “Art was caught up in the maelstrom of student activism and demands for greater participation by diverse stakeholders in the governance process that featured large in the public arena of Ontario universities.” He believed that Dr. Bourns, “was absolutely the right man at the right time to deal with these impossibly contrary and opposing forces.”

In the words of Dr. Alvin Lee, who served as Dr. Bourns’ Vice-President, Academic, and later as President, “Two characteristics stand out: his huge commitment to trying to improve the public funding of university education and research, and his astuteness and humanity in dealing with political tensions on campus.”

Arthur Bourns’ first passion, however, was his love for the students, whom he served as mentor and Professor. A strong believer that teaching and research must go hand in hand, he often remarked that these commitments were the most fulfilling. When he was made an Honorary Member of the McMaster Alumni Association in 2012, he declared “It was a truly marvelous privilege to have a career involving association with young people and to be able to follow their progress in their studies and their personal qualities.”

He utilised a well-developed lecturing technique which, combined with a particularly effective use of the blackboard, enabled him to make his subject come alive. This rare teaching quality was also evident when supervising graduate students, which often served as the catalyst for lengthy discussion well into the night, ‘shedding light’ on the fascinating subject of his research. His individual attention and great capacity for understanding the frustrations of his students taking their first steps in independent research provided strong encouragement and inspiration for them to strive for higher achievement.

contributed by Alan Frosst

TRAVEL OPPORTUNITIES THROUGH CURAC

Those of you who like organized tours may be interested in opportunities available through the College and University Retiree Associations of Canada (CURAC). CURAC recently entered into an agreement with the travel firm Collette to offer a broad range of 160 tours around the world to member associations of CURAC, of which MURA is one. To launch this new initiative, CURAC President Ken Craig is hosting a river cruise from Amsterdam to Budapest in June 2016.

To find out more about this cruise, other tours offered by Collette and special offers available to CURAC members, visit www.collette.com or phone 1-800-248-8991. Mention that you are a CURAC member. All MURA members qualify.