

S. Lee Barbour (1956–2023)

by John Krahn



Lee Barbour's early childhood was spent in India with his parental family as his parents had embarked on a mission's project there. Upon returning to Canada, Lee's entire life was spent in Saskatchewan, apart from short-term work projects or educational periods, including sabbaticals, which took him elsewhere from time to time.

Lee obtained his Bachelor of Engineering Degree (BE) in 1979 at the University of Saskatchewan, Department of Civil Engineering. Immediately thereafter, he continued with studies in geotechnical engineering towards a Master of Science Degree (MSc), which he completed at the University of Saskatchewan in 1981.

After a short time spent in the consulting world, Lee accepted an academic position with the Department of Civil Engineering at the University of Saskatchewan. While fulfilling his duties and responsibilities at the university, he also worked on meeting the requirements for his PhD, a degree which was granted by the University of Saskatchewan in 1987. Lee remained in academia at the University of Saskatchewan for his entire professional career.

Lee flourished in both his teaching and research. He excelled as an educator as evidenced by the many teaching excellence awards he received. Students loved his enthusiastic presentations and his effective research supervision.

He also became a world-renowned scientific researcher. Documenting all of Lee's published papers, recognitions, and professional activities, makes for a very long list – too long to detail here, except to note that it is a very impressive list.

Lee presented the Canadian Geotechnical Colloquium at the 1995 CGS Conference in Vancouver. He also presented the R.M. Hardy Address at the 2014 CGS Conference in Regina, and some CGS members may remember his presentations on his CGS Cross-Canada Lecture Tour in 2012.

Ultimately, after his long and distinguished career at the University of Saskatchewan, Lee was given a Distinguished Professorship position.

During one of his sabbaticals, Lee and his wife, Twila, spent time in Northern Ireland where Lee was welcomed at Queen's University Belfast. Following that sabbatical, Lee continued to make many trips to Northern Ireland where he continued assisting with graduate research, ultimately given the position of Honorary Professor at the university.

Overarching all of his recognitions and accomplishments, Lee made a life-long worldwide indelible imprint on the science and application of heat and mass transport in the management of mining waste and the reclamation of mined landforms. Saying it this way does not lend sufficient credence to the significance of this research work, except to add that Lee's contributions were very sophisticated and enlightening.

Despite Lee's many academic and professional achievements, he never lost his pastoral heart and was always all too willing to help others. Sometimes this meant getting involved in a colleague's project, sometimes it meant helping students one-on-one with their scholastics, and sometimes it meant counselling students with personal issues.

One night while relaxing at home, Lee experienced extreme pain in his lower back, pain so severe that he, a very fit man, was unable to make it up the stairs in his home. While looking for the cause for the extreme pain, it was discovered that Lee was suffering from stage four multiple myeloma. After coming to terms with his affliction, Lee, being the ever-true scientist and researcher, tried to understand the science of the disease along with its possible treatments. Sadly, despite his valiant efforts while undergoing various treatments, some of which were medically experimental, Lee lost his battle to cancer in April 2023 at the relatively young age of 66.

The Canadian Geotechnical Society posthumously awarded the 2023 R.F. Legget Medal to Lee at the annual CGS Conference held in October 2023 in Saskatoon.

Memories of Lee will live on for a very, very long time.