

# Tribute to Kenneth T. Rainey

BY CAROL BARNUM, Fellow

**K**enneth T. Rainey, known to so many in STC for his major contributions to the Society and to the discipline of technical communication, died on September 24, 2006, of complications from cancer. His death was unexpected and sudden, as he had just retired from teaching in July and was in the process of moving his family from Georgia to Tennessee to begin the next phase of his life.

Among his many honors and accomplishments, Ken was an STC Fellow; a recipient of the Jay R. Gould Award for Excellence in Teaching Technical Communication and the Distinguished Chapter Service Award; a member of the STC Board, where he served as Assistant to the President for Academic and Research Programs; a stem manager for STC's annual conference and an active speaker at STC conferences and local chapter meetings; president of the Atlanta Chapter STC; a mentor to hundreds of students; and a colleague and friend of technical communicators around the world.

Ken taught technical communication at Southern Polytechnic State University (SPSU) for eighteen years, arriving in 1988 just as the master's degree program was getting underway. He was a major contributor to the growth of the technical communication program and served as the department chair for his last three years at SPSU. As both a teacher and an administrator, he was instrumental in fostering alliances with programs in Germany, where he taught technical communication for many summers, and in China, where he spearheaded the effort to create the first degree program in technical communication recognized by China's Education Ministry.

The week before his death, the SPSU technical communication advisory board hosted its first annual banquet, named "RaineyRoast" in his honor. With more than seventy of his former students, colleagues, friends, and family members attending, the event was much more of a toast than a roast, providing a wonderful opportunity to bestow accolades and good wishes on this generous, well-respected exemplar. Although Ken had had surgery the week before, he was upbeat and jovial throughout the roast and summoned surprising strength to get up at the end and give a short, spirited, and articulate expression of gratitude. He reiterated his conviction that technical communication was a wonderful profession with a great future and announced that he and his wife, Elaine, were donating \$10,000 for a scholarship fund to be administered by the SPSU advisory board. When he died unexpectedly the following week, Elaine

requested that, in lieu of flowers, donations be made to the scholarship fund. These have been coming in from all over North America.

The following are among the many tributes that have been sent from his colleagues around the world.


Jamie Conklin, Winnipeg, Canada: "I took over from Ken as chair of the Education and Research Professional Interest Committee (as it was then called) back in the mid '90s. Ken was a wonderful mentor and advisor. I remember he sat me down and told me with a marvelous

blend of candor and empathy about the politics of STC leadership and advised me on how to help lead a community as diverse as an STC community. His help and advice was always wise and welcome."

Russel Hirst, professor, department of English, University of Tennessee, Knoxville: "Ken, you'll be profoundly missed. There will be no filling your shoes, but you'll always represent to us the best in our profession."

Marjorie T. Davis, professor and chair, technical communication, Mercer University, Macon, Georgia: "Kenneth Rainey was one of those rare teachers who were loved by their students, respected by their coworkers, and admired by colleagues around the world. Students universally speak

about Ken's personal interest in them and helpfulness in directing their careers. He was not an aloof, ivory-tower kind of man. He loved students, and they loved him."

Zhang Jun, professor and chair, e-business department, Northeast Normal University, China: "I was told the terrible news about Dr. Rainey's death. I just couldn't find proper words to express my grief over the loss of our dearest friend. He was so kind and sympathetic, and he has contributed so much to the success of our program. I love him and he shall live deep in our heart and mind forever. We all shall miss Dr. Rainey greatly." 



*Editor's note: At its October meeting, STC's Board of Directors accepted a proposal to create a new research award in honor of Professor Rainey. The Ken Rainey Award for Excellence in Research will acknowledge the importance of quality research to technical communication. More details about the award will appear in Intercom.*