

## **John Auxier – a master Health Physics icon and so much more**

(As published in The Oak Ridger's Historically Speaking column the week of 9-21-2020)

We lost the presence of greatness and a whole world of unique information when John Auxier passed away recently. I am on the board of the Free Medical Clinic of Oak Ridge, founded by John and one of his proudest achievements. However, he was also a giant among the health physics world. He wrote a book, *Ichiban: The Dosimetry Program for Nuclear Bomb Survivors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki*, about the amount of radiation received as a result of the atomic bombs.

I asked David Coffey and Eric Abelquist, two who knew John well, to write their impression of John in his honor and also asked for input from members of the Free Medical Clinic of Oak Ridge and Harriman board and staff. Here is what they each had to say:

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From David Coffey:

John had an illustrious career, mostly in health physics. He was a founding member of the international Health Physics Society, their first president and the first editor of their Health Physics Journal. He was appointed to a first scientific study group to visit Japan after the war and examine the effects of the bombings. There, he met with survivors and examined the aftereffects. He told of a survivor who was in the basement of a concrete telephone building that was very close to ground zero of Hiroshima. The man came out of the building wondering what happened. The concrete shielded him from the blast and the radiation. John said relatively few died of radiation. Most were blown up or burned up.

He was appointed to head the Health Physics Division of ORNL by Alvin Weinberg, who had him leave ORNL for a year to get his accelerated PhD at Georgia Tech. Weinberg needed him to replace K.Z. Morgan who was retiring as head of the Health Physics Division. Quietly, Weinberg thought Morgan had become paranoid about low level radiation effects. John's group published many fundamental research papers, more than any other ORNL division at that time. Incidentally, Eric is a top expert on radiation effects now. His presentation to ETEC a few months ago was the best general knowledge summary I have seen.

John also inspired and founded the Free Medical Clinic, modeled after a similar clinic in Knoxville founded by Dr. Tom Kim. John's diligence in organizing the Free Medical Clinic displayed his caring heart. John was showing signs of his age recently, falling, being hospitalized and moving into Hospice care. That lasted only days. Dr. Kim had just left from a visit with him and Mary Lou at their home when John passed away.

He was also deeply religious, though quietly so. We all witnessed his front of the church position with Mary Lou for as long as he was able to attend. I was blessed to be one of his lunch and dinner buddies. We shared a passion for flying. He even once owned a Loudon County farm with his own airstrip. But he was the real pilot, having flown in the Air Force. He loved those big thundering radial engines of yore.

John Auxier will be missed but never forgotten, always an inspiration.

From Eric Abelquist:

From a Health Physics Society perspective, Dr. John Auxier was a legend. His accomplishments in the field of health physics are simply astounding, and a testament to his strong work ethic and character. The following HPS activities and awards are why I confer "legend status" to John Auxier [my anecdotal comments in parentheses]:

1. Recipient of the 1963 Elda Anderson Award [this is the HPS' most prestigious award given to a young member of the Society to recognize excellence in (1) research or development, (2) discovery or invention, (3) devotion to health physics, and/or (4) significant contributions to the profession of health physics.]
2. President of the Health Physics Society, 1977–1978 [John was very active in the HPS during his entire career...serving as our President in 77-78]

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3. Recipient of the 1987 Founders Award [recognizes exceptional service to the HPS or the health physics profession. The recipient of the award is recognized for the sum of contributions to the profession over his or her lifetime...very fitting for John]

4. President of the American Academy of Health Physics, 1991 [AAHP is the partner organization to the HPS that offers membership to all individuals who have been granted certification in Comprehensive Health Physics by the American Board of Health Physics. John's AAHP involvement helped advance the profession of health physics by encouraging the highest standards of ethics and integrity].

5. Recipient of the 2006 Distinguished Scientific Achievement Award [acknowledges outstanding contributions to the science and technology of radiation safety. The recipient of the award is recognized for accomplishments of fundamental importance to the practice, acceptance, and advancement of the profession of health physics.]

6. Life Fellow of the HPS [honors senior members of the Society who have made significant administrative, educational, and/or scientific contributions to the profession of health physics.]

7. Charter Member of the HPS [He was there in the beginning as a charter member when the HPS was formed in 1956]

Obviously, the Health Physics Society is just one facet of John's life and career. He worked with another Health Physics legend, KZ Morgan, at Oak Ridge National Laboratory. In fact, I believe he took the reins of the ORNL Health Physics Division from KZ in the 1970s. The Health Physics colleague that I most closely associate with John Auxier is John Frazier. They worked closely together at Auxier and Associates for many years.

John was a great role model for many of us in health physics. He will be greatly missed.

### **Free Medical Clinic of Oak Ridge and Harriman:**

John who was one of the founding members of Clinics of Hope USA in Knoxville in 2008 had a clear vision to open free medical clinics throughout the Knoxville area for the working poor who did not have medical insurance. John believed everyone deserves healthcare regardless of their ability to afford it. So, John began to get to work to make that happen.

John spoke to his Sunday School class at First United Methodist Church in Oak Ridge and the response of the class was overwhelming. This was when John decided that he would open the Free Medical Clinic in his own backyard of Oak Ridge, Tennessee. But he couldn't do it alone, he needed a powerful compassionate army.

The next step was to find out if there were enough people who would be willing to be volunteers in organizing and setting up the new clinic and keep it going each day. The First United Methodist Church hosted a meeting on July 19, 2008, to mobilize potential volunteers and more than 100 people (medical and non-medical volunteers) showed up! That was the start of an amazing service to the people who needed medical care but were not well positioned to afford it.

Here is an update from Billy Edmonds, Executive Director of Free Medical Clinic of Oak Ridge, who said:

"We are averaging almost 5000 primary care patient encounters per year. We have grown to two clinic sites now, one in Oak Ridge and one in Harriman to serve the Anderson, Morgan, and Roane Counties. We are launching a new annual physical program this fall that will begin seeing each patient at least once a year to increase preventative quality of care services and support.

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"We will be providing over 1000 free flu vaccines over the next three months. We have just launched a new program that enlists FMC representatives in local townships of our three counties to better serve each town in our service area.

"During Covid-19 and even now, we have extended hours at our Harriman clinic, introduced a new Telehealth platform to protect patients and providers from infection, and opened up service to those who may have lost their jobs due to Covid disruptions

"FMC is honored to be a part of the John Auxier legacy and looks forward to expressing John's grace, hope, mercy, and love to each patient we serve now and into the future

Amazing what John started is now among the most effective free medical clinics anywhere.

John's obituary is here:

<https://www.legacy.com/obituaries/knoxnews/obituary.aspx?n=john-alden-auxier&pid=196712703&fhid=26489>

Here is a two-paragraph excerpt: "Dr. Auxier was considered an expert in the areas of nuclear engineering and health physics. He directed research in the investigation of pathways of exposure and biological effects of pollutants, both nuclear and non-nuclear, and toxic agents safety, with emphasis on the needs of practicing health physicists. He participated in, and ultimately directed, successful efforts to obtain radiation doses for the survivors of the nuclear bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Japan. He has been a consultant to the Radiation Effects Research Foundation of Japan.

"Dr. Auxier's special consulting activities have included the President's Commission on the Accident at the Three Mile Island Nuclear Power Plant. Also, he was the head of the task committee health physics and dosimetry for this incident. He has been a member of the Advisory Committee to the U.S. Department of Energy for the Northern Marshall Islands and a member of the Department of Energy/Defense Nuclear Agency Inspection and Advisory Team for the Cleanup of Enewetak Atoll.

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I was fortunate to be invited to John's and Mary Lou's home by John when he had some detailed information which he thought I should know about history related to the atomic bombs and nuclear energy. I filmed him as he spoke about his relationship with Alvin Weinberg. Keith McDaniel recorded his oral history which is available online at:

<http://cdm16107.contentdm.oclc.org/cdm/ref/collection/p15388coll1/id/235>

Even though David, Eric, Billy and I have attempted to bring you some insights in this amazing icon of science, we have only touched briefly upon the full life he lived. John enjoyed flying airplanes, worked on most all of the most significant nuclear events of the Nuclear Age, published over 100 scientific papers, formed his own very successful company, *Auxier and Associates*, and finally established his most proud accomplishment, the Free Medical Clinic of Oak Ridge and Harriman.

John Auxier's legacy will live on. He was a special person with extraordinary skills and abilities who dedicated much of his career to research for advancing the knowledge and understanding of nuclear energy. He chose "Ichiban" as the title of his book, which means "A - Number One" or "The Best" in Japanese. I would say John Auxier was certainly ichiban!

One last thought coming from John's oral history. He formed his own company and managed it as he thought best. He said what he thought was wrong with most organizations today could be summed up as primarily two main things. One was apathy and the other was micro-management. He went on to say that micro-management produces apathy. What insight from a most amazing individual who is renowned as a world expert,

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John Auxier with his trademark smile, good humor, and a world renowned expert health physicist