



May 21, 2019

Ronald C. Petersen, April 26, 1937– July 9, 2018 In Memoriam



Ronald C. Petersen, 81, born April 26, 1937, passed away July 9, 2018. He was a dominant figure in the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers (IEEE) standards development process — so much so that he was named “the Czar of Electromagnetic Energy.” He worked on IEEE standards until his last days — distributing upcoming meeting information for the International Committee on Electromagnetic Safety just a few days before his passing.

Mr. Petersen received the BSEE and MSEP (electrophysics) degrees from the Polytechnic Institute of Brooklyn. He joined the Bell Labs Solid-State Device Development Laboratory in 1960 where he was involved with the development of low-noise travelling-wave maser amplifiers, broadband solid-state amplifiers, and silicon diode array camera tubes. In 1970 he joined the Bell Labs Environmental Health and Safety Center and, until his retirement in 2001, managed the Bell Labs Wireless and Optical Technologies Safety Department, which served as the AT&T and Lucent Technologies Inc. resource for all nonionizing radiation safety issues and related standards.

Ron was as a member of the National Council on Radiation Protection and Measurements from 1993 to 2005 and served as a Board of Director from 1998 to 2003. He chaired Scientific Committee (SC) 89 on Nonionizing Radiation, was a member of SC 89-2 on Practical Guidance on the Evaluation of Human Exposures to Radiofrequency Radiation, a consultant to SC 39 on Microwaves, and served on the Nominating Committee from 1996 to 2001.

Ron received a number of awards including the IEEE Standards Association (SA) Standards Medallion, the IEEE-SA International Award, IEEE-SA Distinguished Service Award, the American National Standards Institute Finnegan Standards Medal, and the International Electrotechnical Commission Thomas A Edison Award. He was an IEEE Life Fellow and a Fellow of the Laser Institute of America.

Colleague, Richard Tell, said “Ron was a low-key kind of guy who was rock solid in his reliability to get the job done. He had the uncanny ability to meticulously record meeting notes in his notebook that he always had with him by hand—no laptop computer—sitting at the meeting making no fuss about anything but extremely accurately documenting every comment made at a committee meeting. How he was able to do this still remains a mystery to those of us left behind.

“It has been almost a year, now, since Ron left us but there is hardly a meeting or telecom in which Ron's name is not mentioned. He left an indelible mark on the many activities that he was involved with.”

Mr. Petersen is survived by his wife, Helen, and his daughter, Christine, who he described as his “grammar guru.”