

In memoriam Leon Knopoff

By Karen Mack

Gold Shield and UCLA lost a beloved member of their extended family with the passing of Leon Knopoff, Joanne Knopoff's husband of almost 50 years. Leon, a distinguished professor of physics and geophysics who joined the UCLA faculty in 1950, died January 20 at age 85 with Jo and their three children at his side.

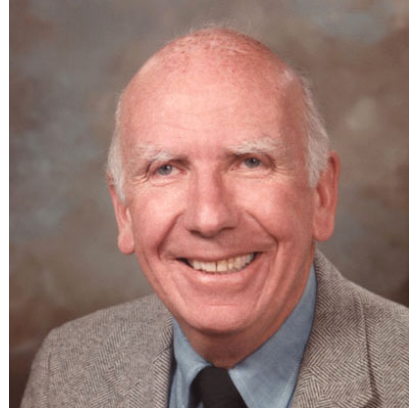
Leon was one of UCLA's most renowned scholars. He directed the UCLA Institute of Geophysics and Planetary Physics (IGPP) from 1972 to 1986 and made many important contributions that extended knowledge in his field. His research focused on the physics and statistics of earthquakes, earthquake prediction, the interior structure of the Earth, plate tectonics and other areas of solid Earth geophysics. He made pioneering measurements of seismic wave velocities and tidal gravity variations at the South Pole. The 1964 representation theorem by Robert Burridge and Leon is recognized as the first principle in modern seismology.

Leon's scholarly work, which he continued until recently, garnered him many honors and prestigious accolades, including membership in the National Academy of Sciences, the American Philosophical Society and the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. He authored more than 360 scholarly publications and was editor or co-editor of five books.

As gifted in the classroom as he was in the laboratory, Leon received four outstanding teaching awards from the Physics Department. He was a valued mentor who saw 38 of his graduate students receive their PhDs and supervised 39 postdoctoral scholars from 17 countries.

The multitalented Leon also had an encyclopedic knowledge of classical music and was a research musicologist at the UCLA Institute of Ethnomusicology. Proficient on piano and harpsichord, he often hosted chamber music sessions at his and Jo's home.

Said Leon's UCLA colleague, Professor Paul M. Davis, "Leon Knopoff's career was exemplary . . . Leon was extremely creative, unusually prolific and elegant in his choice of research topics. His service to his university and profession has also been extraordinary. His selfless cooperation has been truly global."



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Gold Shield was prominent among Leon and Jo's many campus activities. Recalls Michael Knopoff, "My dad was a Gold Shield husband for 50 years, since 1960. He supported [Jo] as GS president, and he always enjoyed the GS events he attended."

All of us in Gold Shield extend heartfelt condolences to Jo and the entire Knopoff family. We will miss Leon's warm, gracious manner and his enduring support of our organization.