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Prof. Dr. Olaf Schmidt retired at 65

Prof. Dr. rer. nat. habil Olaf Schmidt became 65 years old on November 23, 2008. Born in Derschau/Upper Silesia, the family suffered the cruelties of the end of war turmoil until his mother could bring him to a safe refugee camp in Bavaria, West-Germany. In 1952 she got an occupation in Essen, where the boy Olaf – eager for knowledge already at that time – went to school until 1965. Then he studied biology at the University of Münster completing 1973 with a doctoral thesis about the influence of vitamin B1 on an auxoautotrophic bacterium. In November 1973 he joined the Chair for Wood Biology at the University Hamburg. His habilitation was completed in 1980, and in 1983 he was assigned the title University Professor.

The 35 years of intensive research were devoted to the properties of bacteria and fungi and their relations to wood in a broad context. The results of his microbiological studies are well documented in about 140 peer-reviewed publications dealing with basic scientific investigations as well as practical problems of wood deterioration; they are further presented in three voluminous text books.

Main fields of his earlier research concerned the following topics: wood-inhabiting bacteria and their properties and influences on wood decay; physiological characterization of house-rot fungi; growth of edible fungi on wood waste; and the relation between forest decline and micro-organisms. For about 20 years, he gave special emphasis to molecular investigations of indoor wood rot fungi based on the analysis of fungal proteins and nucleic acids and, more recently, to structural elucidation of the ribosomal DNA (rDNA) for the phylogenetic identification of genera, families and orders. Thus, a data set for 18 house-rot fungi could be obtained applicable for diagnosis through sequence comparison. Moreover, the first MALDI-TOF mass spectrometry “fingerprints” of Basidiomycetes were presented. Present research concerns the bacterial origin of the Chestnut decline. The engagement of his long-time assistant Ute Moreth on these research activities is remarkable; their beneficial cooperation is demonstrated by around 50 co-authored papers.

Besides his internationally recognised research work, Prof. Schmidt was also engaged in time consuming lecturing on wood pathology and basics of wood biology in graduate courses of wood science. His well prepared and vivid lectures are much appreciated by the students. Thus he guided a great number of students in their experimental theses and helped foreign colleagues with their work.

Colleagues, students, and guest – who sometimes believe in the first moments of their acquaintance with him, he would have a reserved attitude – experience a pleasant surprise: Prof. Schmidt is one of the most helpful and cooperative teachers in the faculty who enjoys discussing all aspects of wood science.

The short-cut budget will not provide a successor for him. And what would demonstrate better his engagement and love for his work than the fact that he will continue his most needed contributions after his official retirement at the end of the winter term? His colleagues and students thank Prof. Dr. Olaf Schmidt for his past and future engagement in wood science and wish him more leisure time in the future.

Walter Liese, Hamburg

Concerning this event, there was a big party in the lab on November 25, 2008 for which 10 bottles of Champagne were available and a buffet containing at least 10 snacks for each participant.

Olaf Schmidt