

With thanks to Hal Hyde, who sent this Obituary of his cousin and Associate Member of UCSC Emeriti Association.
Stan Stevens

Michael Anthony Sweeney

December 5, 1931 - March 26, 2013
Resident of Santa Cruz

Michael Anthony Sweeney of Santa Cruz died in his home on March 26, 2013 of pancreatic cancer. His family was with him. He taught chemistry at SCU for 46 years and was named professor emeritus. Prior to teaching he worked as a research chemist for Standard Oil, and also rose to the rank of captain while serving in the US Air Force.

Sweeney was born in Los Angeles to James Robert Sweeney and Ruth (Bauter) Sweeney. His father was a film editor for Columbia Pictures in Hollywood.

Sweeney attended Loyola High School, and in 1953 graduated cum laude from Loyola Marymount University. He earned his doctorate in radiation chemistry from Cal Berkeley in 1962. Research for his thesis was directed by Nobel laureates, Amos Newton and Glenn Seaborg at Lawrence Berkeley Labs where Sweeney operated a cyclotron. During that period he is credited along with two other scientists with discovery of the isotope, Rhenium [181].

He performed research and published scientific articles throughout his career. With [NASA-AMES](#), he studied the origin of organic molecules on the early earth and solar system. His investigation into the radiation levels of the primitive Earth atmosphere added to our understanding of the origin of life.

In 1966 Sweeney began teaching at Santa Clara University, calling it, "the best job I've ever had." Students from his first graduating class presented him with a pamphlet titled, "Sweeney's Similes," in which they had transcribed many of the humorous analogies he used during lectures to help them understand the material. Interested in genealogy, Sweeney verified that he was a nephew of Elihu Anthony, one of the founders of the town of Santa Cruz. Anthony created the first foundry and general store in Santa Cruz, and first used the term, "The little city by the sea." A historical marker with Sweeney's name will be placed in the Anthony area of the Santa Cruz Memorial park on Ocean Street.

Sweeney remained in close contact with a group of friends from St. Ambrose Elementary school in Los Angeles. Fondly known as, "The Lads," they had lifelong adventures together.

During his semi-retired years he traveled throughout Ireland, renting a house on Galway Bay in the town of Spiddal, his "home away from home." Friends and family who made the trip over to visit were welcomed, and treated to his knowledge of Ireland, and tours of the countryside including pubs that featured traditional Irish music.

Sweeney is survived by a son, Matthew, a Biochemist in Palo Alto, A daughter, Anna, an interior designer in San Francisco, and a son, Daniel, a systems engineer in San Jose. He adored, and was adored by, a grandson, Jonathan, 8, and a granddaughter, Sophia, 6. Also two nephews, Mark and Christopher, and two nieces Kathleen and Jennifer from his younger brother, Terry, who died in 2003.

A memorial service will be held at Mission Santa Clara on the SCU Campus, on April 11 at 6:00 p.m. His ashes will be laid to rest in Ireland by his children.

In lieu of flowers, the family requests that a charitable donation be made to Santa Clara University, The Chemistry Dept., in Memory of Michael A. Sweeney, University Relations, 500 El Camino Real, Santa Clara. The donations will be awarded to a chemistry major who demonstrates interest in a teaching career, and who also has a sense of humor.

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