Edwin Vedejs

1941–2017

Edwin Vedejs, Editor-in-Chief of Volume 65 of Organic Syntheses, passed away on December 2, 2017. He was 76 years old.

Edwin Vedejs was born in Riga, Latvia, on January 31, 1941. During World War II, he lived for six years in displaced persons camps in Germany before emigrating to the United States in 1950, where he ultimately settled with his family in Grand Rapids, MI.

Ed received a Bachelor of Science degree in chemistry from the University of Michigan (Ann Arbor) in 1962. He completed his Ph.D. in chemistry in 1966 at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, under the direction of Professor Hans Muxfeldt, and performed post-doctoral research from 1966–67 at Harvard University in the laboratory of Professor E. J. Corey.

Ed Vedejs had a long and distinguished career at his two alma maters. He began his independent career at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, in 1967 where he rose to the rank of professor of chemistry, serving as the Helfaer Professor (1991-1996) and Robert M. Bock Professor (1997-98). In 1999, he moved to the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, as the Moses Gomberg Collegiate Professor of Chemistry, a position that he held until his retirement in 2011. In recognition of his accomplishments, the University of Michigan established the Edwin Vedejs Collegiate Professor of Chemistry Chair after Ed's

retirement.

Ed Vedejs was a prolific author and an internationally recognized scholar. The American Chemical Society awarded him the Herbert C. Brown Award for Creative Research in Synthetic Methods in 2004, and in 2008 Ed was named a Fellow of the American Chemical Society.

Ed Vedejs was an expert in synthetic and mechanistic organic chemistry and was also a leader in the development of synthetic approaches to numerous natural products. Throughout his career, Ed studied a number of fundamentally important problems in the field of organic chemistry. Among his most noteworthy contributions are his seminal studies on the mechanistic and stereochemistry of the Wittig reaction. Ed was the first to demonstrate that oxaphosphetanes are stable reaction intermediates, and his careful kinetic analyses were critical to the development of a unifying mechanistic scheme that provides the now widely accepted rationale for understanding the stereoselectivity of this important reaction. His kinetic and mechanistic insights also led to practical improvements of the reaction, specifically with respect to the synthesis of (E)-alkenes from non-stabilized ylide precursors.

Ed's early contributions from the University of Wisconsin also included seminal studies in organopalladium chemistry, and the development of the MoOPH reagent for enolate hydrosylation. Additional work in sulfur ylide ring expansions, thioaldehyde cycloadditions, and silicon-mediated 1,3-dipole generation allowed for the exploration of basic questions of chemical reactivity in the context of total synthesis.

After moving to the University of Michigan in 1999, Vedejs' research focused on several unique and powerful methods for asymmetric synthesis, including the use of "fragile asymmetry" based on temporary boron-based chiral centers, asymmetric protonation of prochiral enolates, parallel kinetic resolution, chiral phosphines as acyl transfer catalysts, and the clever use of deuterium isotope effects to "protect" an acidic center. Ed's seminal contributions in these areas have had a substantial (and still growing) impact on the field of asymmetric synthesis.

During his 45-year career, Ed supervised more than 80 Ph.D. theses and numerous post-doctoral and undergraduate research projects. Many of his former students now hold prestigious positions in academia and in the biopharmaceutical industry. All testify to

Ed's brilliant insights, his exceptional chemical intuition, his unwavering requirement of scientific rigor, and his passion for the chemical sciences.

In addition to his stellar contributions as a research scientist, Ed Vedejs served the organic synthesis research community with distinction. He served as associate editor of the *Journal of the American Chemical Society* from 1994–99, as chairman of the NIH Medicinal Chemistry Study Section (1990–91), and as chair of the Organic Division of the American Chemical Society (2003), among many other contributions. Ed was a member of the Organic Syntheses Board of Editors from 1980 to 1988 and served as the Editor for Volume 65.

Ed also had an unwavering commitment to the Latvian chemistry research community. He worked tirelessly to promote science in Latvia by sponsoring graduate students and professors to study at the University of Wisconsin. He helped Latvian universities to gain access to research journals, collaborated on international research grants, and taught courses at Riga Technical University. For these efforts he received many honors from Latvia including the Paul Walden Medal (1997), the Grand Medal of the Latvian Academy of Sciences (2005), the Order of the Three Stars (2006), and an honorary doctorate from Riga Technical University (2010).

Ed Vedejs was a scholar of the first magnitude with the unique ability to provide understanding and insights in areas of chemistry that ranged far outside of the problems he was addressing in his laboratory. Ed had the remarkable ability to ask penetrating questions that challenged assumptions and which always addressed the fundamental issues of the problem at hand. I can attest that I grew scientifically and learned enormously from my interactions with Ed at the University of Michigan—he was the consummate colleague, scholar and educator who enriched everyone who had the privilege of interacting with him.

Ed is survived by his loving wife, Pat Anderson; his son, Michael; his daughters Christina Mersereau, Jesikah Cordova, and Julia Vander Meer; and his former wife, Melita Vedejs. He will be deeply missed by his professional colleagues and friends in the United States, Latvia and elsewhere.

William R. Roush