

Joseph J. Cooney: 1934–2008

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Published online: 4 March 2008
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Photo courtesy of Harry Brett

Joseph J. Cooney died in a Boston hospital after a brief illness on 16 February 2008, age 74. Joe was an internationally respected researcher in environmental microbiology and in bioremediation of pollutants. He retired after more than 13 years as Editor-in-Chief of the *Journal of Industrial Microbiology and Biotechnology* (JIMB) in July 2007 with a joyful celebration at the SIM national meeting in Denver (followed only a month later by a 50th wedding anniversary).

Joe Cooney was a founding Senior Editor of JIMB in 1988, and after almost two decades near or at the helm, he handed it off to Allen Laskin. The journal sailed off in good shape, as if the hand on the wheel had not changed. (As a sailing addict, who maintained his own ship for years, Professor Cooney would have liked the metaphor.)

Joe played many other roles within the SIM, including President 1992–1993, and recipient of the Selman A. Waksman Outstanding Educator Award in 1998 and the Charles A. Porter Award in 2000. Among his many other honors were election to Fellowship in the American Association for the Advancement of Science and a Fulbright Scholarship in 1989.

Born, raised, and educated in Syracuse, NY, Joe began his long academic career with faculty positions in New Orleans and then in Dayton, OH. Along the way, Joe and Maggie Cooney raised four children (Sheila, Susan, Joe Jr, and Tim), who continued to enrich their lives and were with them toward the end of his life. A string of joyful dogs was completed with Mollie (full name Molybdenum).

Joe was educated largely in Catholic schools and earned his BS degree from LeMoyne College. He completed his Ph.D. with Don Lundgren at Syracuse University with studies of *Bacillus* sporulation. After a brief time at Loyola University of New Orleans (marked by a strong commitment of Maggie and Joe to racial harmony and as members of a group including the Berrigan brothers—Daniel and Philip, who later became famous as peace activists), they packed up the kids and dogs and moved to still another Catholic University, the University of Dayton in OH, where Joe continued as a research-active faculty member and with both he and Maggie as committed members of the community. Next, Joe accepted his first administrative responsibilities at the University of Maryland, as Professor and Head of the Chesapeake Biological Laboratory at Solomons, MD. From MD, Joe moved to Boston to found a new multidisciplinary, interdisciplinary Environmental, Coastal and Ocean Sciences Department and to offer the first Ph.D. program at the young University of Massachusetts-Boston campus on Boston Harbor, where he could dock his sailboat next to the laboratory.

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Joe's research passions were in the marine environmental arena and in bioremediation. Jet fuel and plastic biodegradation by bacteria was an early topic, followed by many studies on the relationships between hydrocarbon compounds and microorganisms. About 100 research reports were co-authored with a series of familiar names. Organotin degradation (tributyl-tins being a notorious marine pollutant used in anti-fouling paints) was a more recent topic, and he published extensively on the interactions of tin and tin compounds with microorganisms.

Foreign travel—particularly to Ireland and to China – helped solidify what is well known: that the Upstate New York railroad Irish are more Irish even than most born and raised in Eire. Recently, Joe retired to the position of

Emeritus Professor at UMass-Boston, and the Cooneys moved from a vertical house to a horizontal house near Plymouth Massachusetts (close to children and 7 grandchildren), overlooking a pond more suitable in size for swimming than for sailing. His numerous colleagues, friends and family and SIM and JIMB will miss his warmth, his humor, his wisdom and his advice.

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