
People

Profile: Laurens van Deenen, recipient of the 1981 Award in Lipid Chemistry

Laurens van Deenen, the 1981 Award in Lipid Chemistry recipient, noticed something unusual in his reading 25 years ago.

There were good papers on quantitation of phospholipids. There were good papers on physical chemistry.

"But there was no integration of the two," van Deenen says. In his pioneering work to bring the two together, he has become one of the premier researchers on cell membrane structure and function.

But he has not been a researcher cloistered in his lab. When he received the Award in Lipid Chemistry in New Orleans this past May, he was in the midst of a travel schedule that kept him away from his home base at the University of Utrecht for 21 straight days. His acceptance lecture was presented with a clarity and wit that informed and delighted those who heard it. The basic content of that lecture was published in *FEBS Letters*, 123, (1981) p. 1-16. And while his research team consists principally of home-grown talent, van Deenen insures a steady transfusion of new ideas and enthusiasm through a constant stream of visiting professors from around the world.

In addition, van Deenen has been active as an editor or associate editor of top-ranking journals in his field. He has helped organize major conferences. He has served as an officer of international scientific organizations.

If this sounds as though van Deenen is accomplishing more than one person should be able to do, that's probably correct. After all, remember those reports that, aerodynamically, the bumblebee can't fly.

The son of a Dutch railway engineer, van Deenen says he knew as early as 1943 that he wanted to be a biochemist. Achieving that ambition had to await the end of World War II. In 1946, van Deenen began the seven-year program required for a degree in chemistry at the University of Utrecht. Getting to and from school was the first hurdle as all the major bridges across major rivers had been destroyed during the war. By 1950, van Deenen was an instructor for beginning courses in analytical and organic chemistry. He received his basic degree in 1953 and then continued on for his doctorate, which he received in 1957.

It was while a doctoral student that he met his future wife, Marguerite Graaff, in 1954. She was working in an adjacent laboratory where van Deenen had Pregl analysis done on materials he was using in synthesizing phospholipids. They have two children, Jolanda, who is married and living in Canada, and a son, Wouter, a premedical student in The Netherlands.

Van Deenen's professional career can be traced through major biochemical journals (and contributions to the literature are one of the criteria for the Award in Lipid Chemistry). Since 1960, he has authored or coauthored more than 300 scientific publications. He has been associate-managing editor for *Biochemica et Biophysica Acta*,



van Deenen

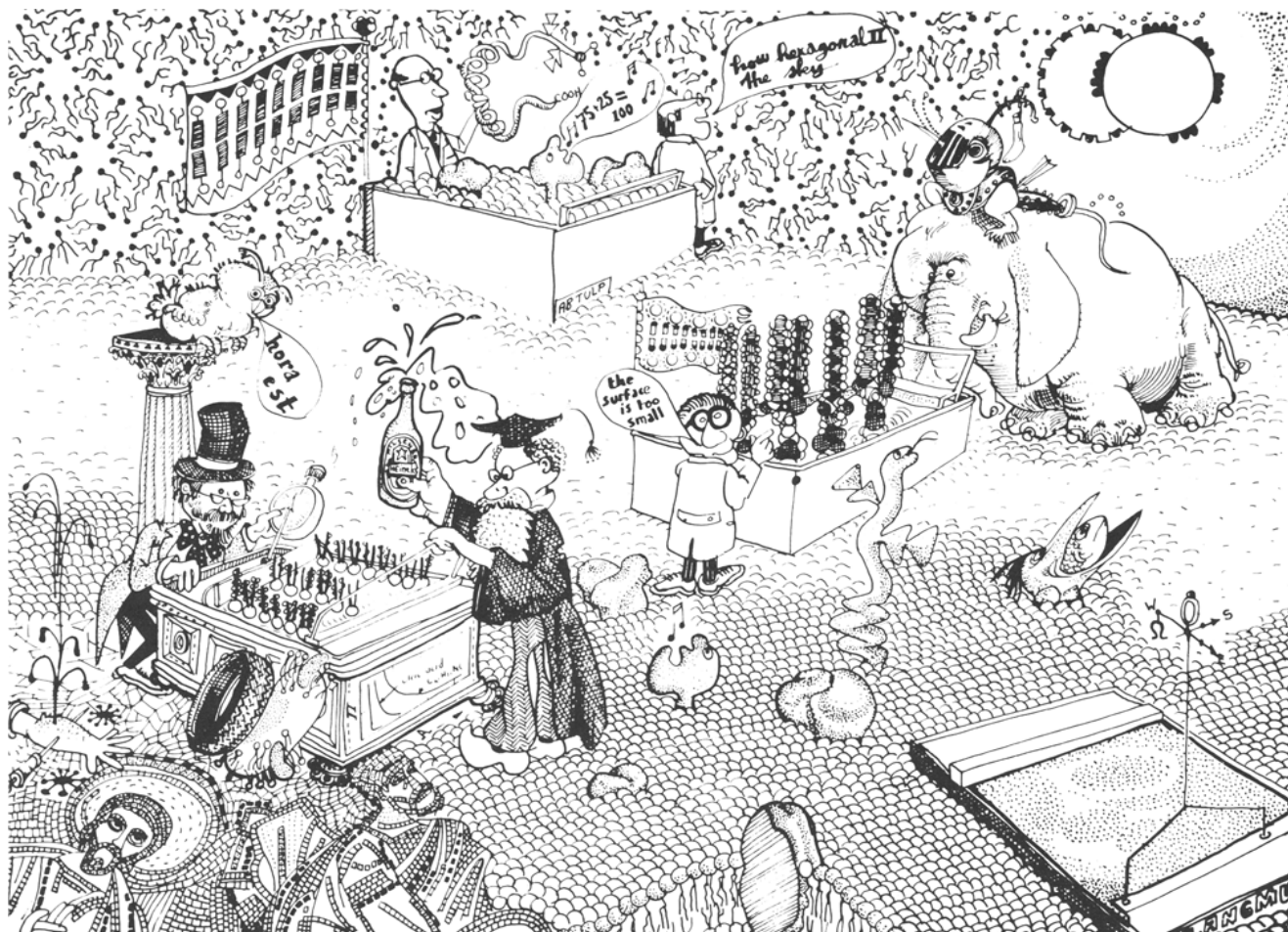
coeditor for Florin-Stotz *Comprehensive Biology*, and on the advisory board of *Bioorganic Chemistry* and for *Progress in Surface Science*.

Meanwhile, he has organized his own research team into specialized groups. One group may concentrate on analytical chemistry, another on physical chemistry, a third on lipid chemistry and another on membranes. Each works on a portion of the central problem being researched and then the results are brought together. It is a structure that requires, and has, good personal relationships among the participants, van Deenen says.

"We have a lot of (scholastic) inbreeding in that most of the workers are from the University of Utrecht," he says, "but all of our people eventually spend extensive periods of time abroad." Van Deenen, for example, has been a visiting professor at the Universities of Arizona, Tokyo, Illinois and Guelph, as well as at Wake Forest, Cornell, City University of New York and the Indian Institute of Science.

"We enjoy a lot of visiting professors," he adds. "We've had about 120 visiting scientists in 15 years." As in most university organizations everywhere, van Deenen says funds are becoming harder to obtain and those available do not buy as many goods or services as they used to.

The study of cell membranes is relatively new, and the work being done now is an attempt to determine how a cell membrane functions and the role of the various components. A central theme for van Deenen is the study of the interaction of lipids with proteins on the molecular level. When researchers complete this initial work on cell membranes (and that may take quite a while), it may be possible to determine the effect of diet, especially dietary fats, on cell membranes. Van Deenen did some early work on that topic in the 1960s and may be looking at it again.



A fanciful version of membrane studies van Deenen used with article in *Trends in Biochemical Sciences* 1 (1976) 112-114, later modified to include recognition of Heineken Prize van Deenen received in 1976.

For active recreation, van Deenen is a wind-surfer. This involves fitting a sail to a surfboard and then trying to stay upright. Holland is a popular center for the sport in Europe. The sport requires strength and agility, and, van Deenen notes, it often startles younger participants to see someone 30 years their senior climb on a board and begin skimming the waves.

At home, his weekends are used for editorial work for various journals, but he does maintain a half-acre heather garden. Heather gardeners try to keep their patches of the ground-cover shrub in bloom continuously throughout the year, which is especially challenging in the Utrecht climate. There are more than 200 varieties of heather, van Deenen says, and he uses 50 of the hardier ones in his garden.

It is just as well for van Deenen's heather that the reports of the bumblebee's unfitness for flight are false, just as it is beneficial to lipid biochemists that this personable researcher has been able to accomplish as much as he has. □

James P. Minyard of the Mississippi State Chemical Laboratories and Robert D. Stubblefield of the USDA's Northern Regional Research Laboratory have been named 1981 Fellows of the Association of Official Analytical Chemists (AOAC). . . . Leonard Stoloff of FDA received the AOAC's 1981 Harvey W. Wiley Award for his work on mycotoxins. . . . John Weekers was elected 1981-82 chairman for CESIO (Comite Europeen des Surfactants et Intermediaires Orga-

niques), an international surfactant organization in Europe. . . . Walter V. David has been named vice-president and director of procurement and distribution of Kraft Inc.'s food service division. □

Deaths

Victor (Zeke) Zehnder

Victor L. (Zeke) Zehnder, an active member of the AOCS since 1953, died Aug. 14, 1981, in Louisville. He was 60. Mr. Zehnder was the long-time corporate representative in AOCS for the Votator Division of Chemetron until his retirement from that firm in 1977 with 31 years service. Since then he had been active in the surplus process equipment business.

Mr. Zehnder was a mechanical engineer, graduating from the University of Louisville in 1943. He was a past-president of the Bonnycastle Club and Hunters Club in the Louisville area. Survivors include a sister, Zylpha Zehnder.

Marvin M. Jameson

AOCS has been informed of the death of Marvin M. Jameson, general manager for the Milwhite Co. Inc. in Houston, Texas, and a member of AOCS since 1936. Mr. Jameson had been with Milwhite when he joined the Society. He was a graduate of Trinity University in Waxahachie, Texas.