

RICHARD (CAMPY) CAMPANELLA (1936-2019)

By Peter Robertson



Richard Campanella passed away peacefully, surrounded by his family on July 10, 2019 in Vancouver. He leaves his loving wife Patricia and sons David (Diane), Michael (Melinda) and Rick (Sarah) and nine grandchildren; Luke, Sophie, Lilah, Noah, Siobhan, Thea, Blake, Avery and April.

Richard was affectionately known to everyone as “Campy” and his name was synonymous with in-situ testing in the geotechnical engineering community. Campy was highly regarded as a professor, teacher and researcher.

Campy was born in New York but studied at the University of California at Berkeley between 1957 to 1965. He was the first PhD student of Professor James K. Mitchell at UC Berkeley, studying strain rate effects on soil. He was a Professor in Civil Engineering at the University of British Columbia for over 30 years starting in 1965, and retired as a Professor Emeritus. He acted as a teacher and mentor to many graduate students. In the early stages of his time at UBC he built a world-class soils laboratory. He was an early adopter of the personal computer and was one of the leaders in computer-controlled laboratory testing.

In the mid-1980s, Campy decided to move his laboratory experience and knowledge into the field and he constructed a unique custom truck for in-situ testing. He rapidly became recognized as one of the leading experts in the new area of in-situ testing of soils. After testing all the main soil types within driving distance of UBC, he managed to take his in-situ testing truck to the Canadian arctic, as well as several mine tailings dams in western Canada where he obtained valuable research data.

Campy was active in the Canadian Geotechnical Society in the 1970s and 1980s. He was the Chair of the Organizing Committee of the 29th CGS Conference held in Vancouver in 1976, and was a CGS Cross-Canada Lecturer in 1982. In 2002 he was the recipient of the Vancouver Geotechnical Society’s Award for his contributions to the practice of geotechnique in the Vancouver area.

Campy was also passionate about jazz and attended many festivals with his wife, Pat whom he had met in San Francisco. He and Pat travelled extensively. He was an active member in his local church, Boy Scouts and Knights of Columbus. During his working life, Campy was hardworking. During his retirement, he spent time with his family, uniting them through many celebrations and vacations together. He also leaves a legacy of outstanding research work that continues to inspire and aid geotechnical engineers world-wide.