

TRIBUTE TO DR. JAMES W. NECKERS

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It is rare enough for a young scientist to spend four decades in continuous service as a teacher at one institution before retirement, and even of this small group, few can look back on such a remarkable degree of change—much of which they promoted—as can Dr. James W. Neckers. On Saturday, October 10, 1970, Southern Illinois University, in grateful recognition of his superb contributions, dedicated its new six-million dollar Physical Science Building and officially named it the James W. Neckers Building.

Dr. Neckers, a native of New York, was graduated from Hope College; he completed his Ph.D. at the University of Illinois in 1927, at the age of 25, and joined the faculty at S.I.U. Two years later, he took over the chairmanship of the Department of Chemistry. Dr. Neckers played a leading role in the design of the new Parkinson Laboratory. But most important to those of us who were chemistry majors was the fact that we were exposed to enthusiastic, well-trained and dedicated teachers who devoted an enormous amount of time encouraging and counseling each of us.

At that time, the Chemistry faculty consisted of only four members (known affectionately as the "Four Horsemen"); namely, Drs. Neckers (Analytical-Inorganic), T. W. Abbott (Organic), R. A. Scott (Biochemistry) and K. A. Van Lente (Physical). Although each man taught the advanced courses in his respective specialty, all cooperated in the teaching of Freshman Chemistry. It was not until 1945 that a fifth man was added to the staff, and shortly afterwards, an astounding rate of growth ensued.

When Dr. Neckers came to S.I.U., the institution conferred only the B.Ed. degree and consisted of a total student body numbering less than 2,000. At the time of his retirement (1967), S.I.U. had become a full-fledged university with over 20,000 students, a large graduate school with doctoral programs in many disciplines and a chemistry faculty of 24 members. Under his guidance, an ACS accredited program for Chemistry majors was approved, and, subsequently, M.S. and Ph.D. programs were started in 1957 and 1963, respectively.

Dr. Neckers served as a President of the Illinois Academy of Science, and was long active as a member of the Illinois Teachers Association, National Teachers Association, the American Chemical Society and other professional organizations.

His role, however, was not limited to things chemical and scientific. As a true scholar, his concern for the welfare of the entire University was great. He was active in A.A.U.P. and a leader in faculty participation in University affairs which led to the formation of the Faculty Council.

In 1966, former students elected him as recipient of the Alumni Association's Great Teacher Award. Many of these alumni do not know that he was active in the planning of the new building which now bears his name. They remember best his quick wit, his dry humor, his absolute dedication to high standards of scholarship and personal behavior and his untiring effort to impress these upon every student who was privileged to be associated with him. This is why hundreds of former students admire and respect him both as teacher and friend.