



HERBERT J. C. KOUTS

1919–2008

Elected in 1978

“For contributions in nuclear engineering, especially physical principles and safety of nuclear power reactors and nuclear materials safeguards.”

COURTESY OF BROOKHAVEN NATIONAL LABORATORY
SUBMITTED BY THE NAE HOME SECRETARY

HERBERT J. C. KOUTS, who joined Brookhaven National Laboratory (BNL) on July 1, 1950, and retired as a senior physicist on October 24, 1989, died at age 88 on January 7, 2008.

The long-term value of Kouts’s achievements was recognized in 2005 with the American Nuclear Society’s (ANS) George C. Laurence Award for “his pioneering contributions to advancing nuclear safety and his remarkable career of leadership in initiating, guiding and executing national and international programs of great and lasting importance.”

Kouts received a B.S. in mathematics in 1941 from Louisiana State University and, after service in the U.S. Air Force from 1942 to 1945, an M.S. from Louisiana State in physics in 1946. He earned his Ph.D. in physics from Princeton University in 1952.

At BNL, Kouts’s first position was as an associate physicist heading the Reactor Shielding Group at the Brookhaven Graphite Research Reactor, which operated until 1968. In 1952 he became head of the Experimental Reactor Physics Group, then headed the Reactor Physics Division in 1956. He received tenure in 1957.

In 1963, Kouts won the E. O. Lawrence Award from the Atomic Energy Commission (AEC), an agency that evolved into U.S. Department of Energy (DOE). He was cited “for

the development of new experimental techniques in reactor physics and their applications to a better understanding of theoretical models of chain reacting systems.”

Kouts was one of the five coinventors of the High Flux Beam Reactor (HFBR), in operation from 1965 to 1999. In 1988 the ANS cited experiments at the HFBR in which “the data obtained have played a central role in the development and understanding of solutions to many problems in solid state physics, chemistry, and structural biology.”

In 1968, Kouts became the first head of the new Technical Support Organization at BNL, which was established to advise and assist the AEC on nuclear safeguards. Five years later, in 1973, he became the AEC director of the Division of Reactor Safety Research. Then in 1975 he became director of the Office of Nuclear Regulatory Research for the newly formed Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC). He was honored with the Distinguished Service Award from the AEC in 1975 and from the NRC in 1976.

Kouts returned to BNL in 1976 as head of the International Safeguards Project Office, being named chair of the Department of Nuclear Energy in 1977. He became a member of the International Nuclear Safety Advisory Group of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in 1985, and, following the Chernobyl nuclear reactor accident in April 1986, he coauthored the IAEA’s report on Chernobyl.

In 1988, Kouts stepped down as department chair, continuing at BNL as a senior physicist. Retiring a year later, he was named presidential appointee to the Defense Nuclear Facility Safety (DNFS) Board, an agency that oversees nuclear safety at DOE defense facilities. He remained there until 1997, then became a consultant until 2000. As *Newsday* quoted DNFS Chair A. J. Eggenberger, “Kouts had a tremendous influence in nuclear safety matters, essentially through the life of the industry until now.”

His wife wrote:

“Herbert Kouts was an avid reader and he loved to travel to places all over this country and the world. He loved to sail and kept various sailboats in the Bay near our house. He also was a music lover and he enjoyed attending symphonies, chamber music concerts, ballet, and the opera. He liked to work on our house in Bellport, painting and fixing things. He enjoyed being with his children and grandchildren. And he also loved to fix delicious meals for all of us!”

A resident of Bellport, Herbert Kouts is survived by his wife Barbara; daughters Catherine Sigmon and Anne Golden; stepsons Francis Spitzer, Michael Spitzer, and Daniel Spitzer; and nine grandchildren.