



Clyde E. Kessler

CLYDE E. KESLER

1922–2011

Elected in 1977

“For contributions to the understanding of fatigue, fracture, creep, shrinkage, and relaxation of concrete.”

BY WILLIAM J. HALL

CLYDE KESLER was born on May 7, 1922, in Condit Township, Illinois, to Roy and Helen Kesler. He graduated from Champaign High School in 1939 and from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (UIUC) with a BS in civil engineering in 1943.

After earning his undergraduate degree, Kesler enlisted in the US Army, serving during World War II in General Patton’s Third Army and attaining the rank of captain. After the war, he served until 1946 in the US Army Corps of Engineers Reserves with the ultimate rank of major. He received his UIUC MS degree in 1946 in civil engineering with an emphasis on structural engineering.

Kesler married Mary Anne Kirk on July 20, 1947. They had two sons, two granddaughters, and five great-grandchildren.

Beginning in 1947, Kesler held positions in the University of Illinois Department of Theoretical and Applied Mechanics (TAM), becoming a professor in 1962. Thereafter he held appointments in TAM and civil engineering jointly, and retired in 1982 with the rank of professor emeritus.

During his career Kesler was active in a number of technical and professional organizations, including the American Concrete Institute (president in 1967), the American Society of Civil Engineers, and the American Society of Engineering Education. He was also active in community affairs, for example, the Champaign School District Board of Education. He was a member of Wesley Church in Urbana.

Kesler was an expert in the properties of cements, additives (for example, fibers, for which he held a patent), and aggregates of many kinds for reinforced concrete. He carried out basic research on fatigue strength, cracking, and durability of concrete materials. He was called to be a consultant in such matters by scores of companies in the United States and overseas.

Kesler was honored with many awards, including the prestigious American Concrete Institute Lindau Award in 1971 and the Halliburton Education Leadership Award from the UIUC College of Engineering in 1982. In 1977, he was elected to membership in the National Academy of Engineering, the highest honor an engineer can receive.

Kesler achieved national and international fame when, in 1970, instead of having his concrete class cast the usual cylinders and small beams, he challenged them to build a concrete canoe as a class project. A year later Purdue joined in the building and racing competition, and the concept thereafter blossomed nationally and internationally, today involving thousands of college students worldwide. In 1987 the American Society of Civil Engineers agreed to manage the competitions. The Illinois team, named the Boneyard Yacht Club after a creek going through campus, marked its 40th year in 2011. Kesler remained a supporter of the team until his death, and he is known at the University of Illinois as the Father of the Concrete Canoe.

Clyde was an outdoorsman and avid fisherman. He pursued angling as you might imagine an engineer would, customizing his bass boat, making his own rods and lures, and studying the habits of his prey. He loved nature and wildlife in general. He spent countless hours working in his yard, which contained a wide variety of trees that were home to numerous

birds. His other personal interest was genealogy. He compiled the Kesler family tree, which he traced back to Westerberg, Germany, in the 1600s.

Kesler died December 30, 2011, in Champaign County, Illinois. He will be sorely missed by his family and colleagues.