

Rolland "Rollie" David Berger, 86, who brought the concept of sustainability to Chico State, died on Thursday, Feb. 18, as a result of being hit by a vehicle while he was crossing Mangrove Avenue at Palmetto at about 7:50 p.m. He was born in 1923.

Berger was hired in 1973 as Chico State's first University Planner to run a planning and development program under the new Regional Programs out of Regional and Continuing Education. The programs focused on the University's 12-county Northeastern California Service Area.

After the regional program ended, Berger received retreat rights in Geography and Planning and taught many courses. He and his students brought solar technology to the campus and retrofitted an existing house that stood where the BMU sits today.

Berger retired in 1983 and continued to be active in private and nonprofit endeavors. He was an advocate for sustainable development in Chico.

"Rollie went before the city and worked with real estate, property, and development interests to advance good, sustainable development practices in northern California," said Bill Collins, friend and colleague. "He was one of the last great visionaries in the University, a dear friend, and colleague to so many of us."

Jim Clafin, now an adjunct professor in GEOP, spent time with Berger in the 1980s when Clafin was a student. "Rollie was quite a talker, as well as a good listener, and so we often spent hours together. He was a passionate person and concerned, especially on environmental matters. One of his special desires was marrying his environmental interests with his background in industry, especially plastics (what later became known as appropriate technology). He was also a major advocate for sustainability long before it was popular, or probably even widely respected. His support for sustainability extended well beyond campus. He was interested in co-housing well before Chico had its own co-housing development. He experimented by building a rammed-earth house in Chico, which still stands and probably will for a long time. He was a man of many ideas, great concerns, and significant efforts. To use one of his own phrases, he was a 'kindred soul' to many."

"Chico lost one of its most outstanding citizens when Rollie Berger died in a traffic accident last week," said Ladd Johnson, who hired him in 1974. "I knew Rollie not only as a former colleague in the Department of Geography, but also as a personal friend. He was one of the most futuristic thinking people that I have known. He had a passion for saving the environment and invested not only his time, but a goodly amount of his income in developing projects devoted to this purpose. He was always a positive person. I never heard him make a negative comment about anyone. Rollie was devastated when his wife died unexpectedly a few years ago. My hope is that if death has a rewarding side, Rollie will now find peace. So long, my friend."

Berger was preceded in death by his wife, Phyllis. He is survived by his children Jana Lawton (David), Kirk Berger (Ruth), Jeffrey Berger, grandsons Jesse and John Lawton and Wade and Ryan Berger, and his brother and sister-in-law John and Viola Berger.

Information about the service will be forthcoming.

The flag on Kendall Lawn will be lowered in Berger's honor on Friday, Feb. 26.