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David Lee Keith Obituary

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David Lee Keith

David Lee Keith, Retired professor and extension entomologist at the University of Nebraska, Lincoln (UNL), dedicated husband, father, and friend, passed away at age 78 in Lincoln, Nebraska, on 4 February 2019 due to complications from diabetes.

David was born 7 December 1940 in Mankato, Minnesota, to Wendell and Verdeen Keith. He received a B.S. in biology with a minor in chemistry from Gustavus Adolphus College in St. Peter, Minnesota, in 1962. He completed an M.S. degree in entomology under the direction of F. G. Holdaway at the University of Minnesota in 1965. His thesis title was “The Biology of *Protagrotis niveivenosa* (Grote), a Cutworm Infesting Bluegrass Fields in Northern Minnesota, Together with Some Observations on *Cymodes devastator* (Brace), the Glassy Cutworm.”

David began his employment with UNL in 1965 as a teaching and research assistant. In 1967, he was promoted to Instructor. During this time, he pursued a Ph.D. in entomology, which he completed in

Robert Wright. 2019. David Lee Keith Obituary. *American Entomologist*, Volume 65, Issue 3, Page 204.

DOI: 10.1093/ae/tmzo40

1971 under the direction of Kenneth Pruess. His dissertation title was “Comparative Biology, Morphology, and Ecology of the Forage and Grass Loopers, *Caenurgina erechtea* (Cram.), and *Caenurgina crassiuscula* (Haw.) (Lepidoptera).” David was appointed an Assistant Professor of Entomology in 1971; he was promoted to Associate Professor in 1974 and to Professor in 1980.

During his time at UNL, Dave conducted extension programs on a variety of pest problems, including agronomic and horticultural crop insects, public health, urban and stored product pests, and rangeland grasshoppers. He was known statewide from his weekly appearances on *Backyard Farmer*, a live gardening show produced by Nebraska Extension and televised on Nebraska Educational Television.

David led a multidisciplinary team of UNL faculty to develop the first federally funded extension IPM demonstration project in Nebraska, centered on corn and sorghum IPM in Clay County, from 1973 through 1976. In 1987, he also organized a successful annual statewide two-day Extension conference, Crop Pest Management Update, which replaced a series of smaller local workshops. This format made greater depth of programming and inclusion of outside speakers possible.

David took sabbatical leave during 1985 through 1986 to serve as a consultant to the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) Mid-America International Agricultural Consortium Dryland Agriculture Research Project in Settat, Morocco, and later served as team leader for this project from 1987 to 1991. While in Morocco, David conducted research on Hessian fly biology, economic thresholds, and varietal resistance in cereal crops.

When he returned to UNL, David refocused his efforts to meet department needs in urban entomology and distance education. In 1992, he led the development of the first Nebraska Urban Pest Management Conference, which addressed the needs of urban pest management professionals working in structural pest control, public health, and stored product pest control. This popular annual program continues today. He taught residential and online courses in field crop entomology, horticultural entomology, and urban and industrial entomology. David retired from UNL in 2004.

David was a member of several professional and honorary societies, including Gamma Sigma Delta, Epsilon Sigma Phi, Phi Beta Delta, Sigma Xi, the Nebraska Cooperative Extension Association, and the

Entomological Society of America. He was active in all of these organizations and served in several leadership roles, including President of the Partners of the Americas, Nebraska/ Piaui Partnership, President of Phi Beta Delta (Alpha Phi Chapter), the Society of International Scholars and Membership Coordinator for the Nebraska Chapter of Gamma Sigma Delta.

A few of his significant awards included the Distinguished Service Award (1984), Nebraska Cooperative Extension Association; Outstanding Service Award (1983), Partners of the Americas; Award of Merit (1983), Nebraska Honey Producers; Epsilon Sigma Phi State Distinguished Service Award (1997); and Extension Award of Merit, Nebraska Chapter of Gamma Sigma Delta (1998). His online course, Urban and Industrial Entomology, won a Telly Award in 1998.

David's survivors include his wife of 58 years, Brenda, daughters Becky (Mark) Coffelt, Jennifer Keith, Melissa (Shawn) Michaud, and Rachele Keith; granddaughters Hallie (Tyler) Eby, and Polly and Piper Michaud; and sister Sandra Keith.

From the program of his celebration of life:

“He was a modern renaissance man who always loved learning and trying new things; a professor and extension man; a spontaneous lecturer on random facts; and a mischievous jokester ... Dave was a lover of literature, an amazing storyteller and gifted writer. He was a prolific gardener who hated to spray so his yard would be full of insects for photography. He loved the smell of newly mown clover in the morning. David always had a crock of sourdough starter on the counter. He owned every hunting, fishing, and gardening gadget under the sun, books galore, and kept an impossibly messy desk. David loved his dogs as much as his humans.”

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