Remembering John Gates

The following remembrance was penned by a group that included Cathy Roheim, John Sutinen, Lee Anderson, Marisa Mazzotta, Steve Swallow, Barbara Harrison, and Philippe Lallemand.

John Milton Gates, Ph.D., Professor of fisheries economics at the University of Rhode Island for 39 years, died comfortably in hospice at Kent Hospital in Warwick, Rhode Island on March 15, 2011 after a year of fighting pancreatic cancer.

Born January 21st, 1941 to Minnie (Bishop) Gates and Irvine Gates in Nova Scotia, he obtained his undergraduate degree from McGill University in 1962, and his Ph.D. from the University of California at Berkeley in 1969. Following graduation, he moved to Kingston, Rhode Island with his wife (the late) Jane Susan (Krohn) Gates, where he became employed as an assistant professor at the University of Rhode Island in the Department of Resource Economics, with later promotions to associate and full professor.

John is survived by his devoted companion Carol Gibbons, his two sons Jonathan and Sander, Jonathan's wife Nikki and daughter Daphne, and Sander's wife Karen and son Cameron. John is also survived by his brother Carleton, and sisters Marion Waddell, Doris Thorpe, and Barbara Gates.

John's earliest and well known contribution to fisheries economics was the seminal paper Demand Price, Fish Size and the Price of Fish, published in the Canadian Journal of Agricultural Economics in 1975, in which differentiation of prices of fish according to size was shown for the first time to result in a backward-bending demand curve. Lee Anderson recalls that, along with Virgil Norton, John was the first economist to introduce a bioeconomic age-class model, in a technical report for Rhode Island Sea Grant, The Benefits of Fisheries Regulation: A Case Study of the New England Yellowtail Flounder Fishery in 1974. This work was completed well before EXCEL spreadsheets and other more advanced computational software, which made age class modeling much easier to accomplish. John was also an early researcher of aquaculture economics, publishing technical reports on salmon aquaculture in 1980 and on oyster aquaculture in the journal Aquaculture in 1981. The bulk of his research focused upon vessel performance, fleet dynamics and fisheries management, producing many co-authored papers with his several graduate students.

John's contributions almost always contained a significant quantitative element, as one of his great joys was use of mathematical programming. Never one to let new advances in quantitative methods slip past him, John was always exploring new methods and urging his students to apply the most appropriate methods to their research problems.

John cared deeply about the graduate program and the students in the Department of Environmental and Natural Resource Economics. He unfailingly provided research funding for students year after year, and was always supportive of his students during their programs. He generously devoted significant time to one-on-one guidance of students in order to improve their craft, particularly in modeling. He was not averse to sharing his office with his students at times, thus ensuring proper guidance and research progress. Afterwards, as they moved into their careers, his guidance and support continued; John loved to travel far and wide - even to the other side of the world - to visit his former students to discuss potential cooperative work.

One of John’s greatest interests was in applying his knowledge and research to fisheries management, both in New England and globally. To that end, he served on the Social Science Advisory
Committee to the New England Fisheries Management Council for several years and was a frequent recipient of funding from the New England National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) to study issues for the benefit of fisheries management. In 2003, he had a sabbatical at the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) in Rome, and in 1985 at the Institut Français de Recherche pour l’Exploitation de la Mer (IFREMER) in France. John continued his research after retirement, and even after becoming ill with cancer, because he loved his work and continued to see its importance, knowing that the inefficiency of an industry is an important cost to the resource, worker and consumer alike.

John will be remembered for many things, and most recently by former graduate students as a gentle, kind, endearing man who was charmingly absentminded. Many of them fondly recall John walking to the office in the summer from his home near campus wearing shorts with his Birkenstock sandals and black socks. Generations of graduate students and their families will long remember holiday parties graciously held at the Gates' house, with room after room decorated with Jane's collection of hundreds of Santa Clauses which the young children loved to try to count.

The department, and URI, owes part of their international reputations as one of the few strongholds in fisheries economics and marine science to John’s work. His former colleagues, previous students, and friends will sorely miss him.

To allow the department to continue to educate excellent graduate students in honor of John, before his death he seeded a scholarship fund to enhance the educational opportunities for graduate students, studying any topic (not only fisheries) in the Department of Environmental and Natural Resource Economics. The fund is intended to provide stipends, travel to professional conferences for presentations of their research, and other relevant support, growing as the size of the endowment grows. To honor John and his many contributions over the years, donations may be made to this fund by sending a contribution to:

The Professor John M. Gates Memorial Fund
URI Foundation
79 Upper College Road
Kingston, RI 02881 USA