



Leon J. Arp

June 30, 1930 - July 23, 2021

Leon J. Arp, Ph.D., of Blacksburg, Va., died on July 23, 2021, after a long illness. He was born in Norway, Iowa, on June 30, 1930, to Hugo and Leova (Schmidt) Arp, the oldest of five children. After graduating from Walford High School in 1948, he spent four years in the U.S. Air Force serving in air reconnaissance during the Korean War at Itazuke Air Base in Japan.

Arp earned a Ph.D. from Iowa State University, Ames, and served as a professor emeritus of Mechanical Engineering at Virginia Tech Blacksburg for 25 years and earning numerous distinctions in his field for teaching and research.

He is best known for developing the Arp Respirator in the late 1960s, designed for infants experiencing respiratory distress syndrome, at the time the leading cause of infant death in the first week of life. The device is credited with saving hundreds of infants' lives and was profiled in a 1970 photo essay in Life magazine. Arp continued to innovate throughout his career and held more than 25 patents.

In his retirement, Arp enjoyed many hobbies including photography, traveling and green-thumbing at his home greenhouse growing cacti, orchids, and miscellaneous tree varieties.

He was preceded in death by a son, William. He is survived by his wife of 66 years, Kathleen; his children, Nicholas, John and Joseph; and eight grandchildren and one great granddaughter. He also is survived by a sister, Mrs. Joseph Tuttle of Cedar Rapids, Kenneth of Amana, Regis of Fairfax and Allen of Palo; all residing in Iowa.

A funeral mass will be held Tuesday, August 03, 2021 at 11 a.m. in St. Mary's Catholic Church with Father John Asare officiating followed by a private burial at Westview Cemetery. The family will receive friends Tuesday from 10:15 a.m. until service time at the church. Arrangements by McCoy Funeral Home, Blacksburg.

Cemetery Details

Westview Cemetery

723 E. Roanoke Street
Blacksburg, VA

Previous Events

Funeral Mass

AUG 3. 11:00 AM (ET)

St. Mary's Catholic Church
1205 Old Mill Rd
Blacksburg, VA

Tribute Wall

SP

“ I was Dr. Arp's last graduate student at Virginia Tech. He grounded me with his practicality and taught me how to carefully design and build experimental setups. I will always remember him as a patient, clever mentor.

Sandy Poliachik, PhD

Sandy Poliachik - January 01, 2025 at 11:46 PM

DL

“ Lee Arp entered my life during my senior year at Virginia Tech in 1970. He took me on as an electronic design assistant that year. His genius in electromechanical design always impressed me, and the unceasing dedication to his work was unparalleled. He would teach by day, work on his inventions and new designs at night, and be ready for an abrupt visit to Roanoke Hospital whenever the call came in for assistance on a premature birth. Kathy and Lee have always remained close friends of our family. We are so sorry for his passing but realize this puts Lee in a better place. Our hopes and prayers for Kathy and the rest of his family in coping with their tremendous loss.

- Daniel L. Latham

Daniel L. Latham - August 03, 2021 at 01:49 PM

DC

“ I worked for Dr. Leon Arp in the early 1970s when he was a professor in the Industrial Engineering Department at Virginia Tech. As a new secretary in the department, he taught me so much about how to do a good job and do it well. I remember working for Dr. Arp and Gene Dillon in the basement of Randolph Hall as he developed the Arp Respirator. My condolences to his wife, children and grandchildren. He is fondly remembered.

Dot Nolen Cupp - August 02, 2021 at 08:36 AM

LS

“ I want to thank to Lord for Mr. Arp. His "Arp Respirator" saved my sons life 49 year ago. He has a wife and 4 children and are missionaries to Ghana, West Africa... Many lives have been touched because Mr. Arp invention.. Blessed indeed. Asking the Lord to be near you his family and to bring comfort to your hearts..
With kind regards, L. Sarver

L. Sarver - July 30, 2021 at 03:12 PM

MS

Dear family of Dr. Arp: I am indebted to your dear loved one for saving my life. I am that son L. Sarver mentioned. We appreciate the fact that Dr. Arp used his talents to help others. We appreciate his consideration for these precious newborn children. May God's grace be sufficient for you at this time.

M. Sarver - August 04, 2021 at 10:13 AM