



Preston Lee Durrill

April 4, 1936 - August 3, 2021

Preston Lee Durrill, 85, of Blacksburg, passed away on August 3, 2021.

Preston was born on April 4, 1936 to Everett Durrill and Alice Roberts in Fort Madison, Iowa. After high school, he attended MIT where he earned a bachelor's degree in chemical engineering and a master's degree in Nuclear Engineering. In 1966, he earned a doctorate in chemical engineering from Virginia Tech.

Preston spent 37 years as a chemistry professor and Dean of Graduate School at Radford University. After retiring from Radford University, Preston worked as a professor of chemistry and chemical engineering at Virginia Tech. During his 55 years of teaching, he also enjoyed doing science experiments for students in local school districts and working with teachers to further their science accreditation.

He is preceded in death by his parents and brother, David. He is survived by his beloved wife, Lorraine of 55 years; three children: Steven Durrill (Gwen), Beth Graham (Jim), Linda Durrill; and eight grandchildren: Katie, Preston, Ben, Mackenzie, Zoe, Ayla, Leo, and Penelope. He is also survived by his sister in law, BJ Durrill.

Preston had a passion for gardening, playing tennis, and teaching science.

The time and contributions he donated to Radford University and Virginia Tech, as well as local K-12 schools, have left a lasting impression.

Preston's patient, gentle, and caring nature touched and enhanced the lives of his family, friends, students, pets, and the countless plants he nurtured. All who knew him would agree that he left the world in a better place.

In lieu of flowers, the family requests that all donations are made to the American Red Cross where he faithfully donated blood and platelets. A private funeral service will be held for the immediate family. A celebration of Preston's life will be held at a future date.

Tribute Wall



“ Professor Durrill was one of the best professors I've ever had. He taught me in 2009 & 2011 during my time at Virginia Tech, and was my first chemical engineering professor. Thanks to him and his patience with me in his office hours, I passed my first ChemE class (Mass and Energy Balances), which ultimately allowed me to complete my ChemE degree. I am always grateful to him for this. He was such a kind person & I remember him fondly. I can still picture him walking down the hall and his sweet smile. He made such a great impact on so many and is cherished. Sending love to his family & hoping that you all experience comfort in the midst of grieving this great loss. His legacy lives on.
-Reisha (Parham) Rhodenbaugh, VT c/o 2012

Reisha Rhodenbaugh - September 13, 2022 at 08:08 PM

SF

“ Professor Durrill was a wonderful teacher and, for me, an invaluable de facto advisor/counselor as I navigated chemical engineering and chemistry programs at Virginia Tech during the late 00s. I know he touched many lives and will be sorely missed by those who have met him. Wishing his family and friends strength in his memory.

Steven A. Friday - April 01, 2022 at 06:51 PM

AH

“ Dr. Durrill (or, "Hey Anna, this is Preston Durrill," as he would identify himself on the phone) was quick to smile, quick to appreciate, and always seemed willing to assist however he could. He helped bridge chemical engineering and chemistry for many a student. He was polite and professional; it was a pleasure dealing with him. He is missed.

Anna Hawthorne - August 20, 2021 at 03:09 PM

JO

“ In a time when students were chaotically striving to understand who they are and what they want to do in life, Dr. Durrill created a space of psychological safety through his genuine care and desire for us to succeed. He truly shaped the lives of his students, and I will forever be grateful for his help both academically and professionally.

Josh Oliver - August 20, 2021 at 01:34 AM

TS

“ Like mentioned below, Dr Durrill is a major reason why ChemE was an intriguing journey. His excitement and passion for teaching coupled with his wholesome smile and outward joy will never be forgotten. Condolences to your family. He will be missed!

Tim Shinol - August 18, 2021 at 08:17 AM

SS

“ Dr. Durrill was such a genuine soul whose passion was evident in the way he taught his students. He is the reason I continued as a ChemE. Blessed to have known him.



sonya sun - August 12, 2021 at 11:12 AM



“ Dr. Durrill was my first chemical engineering professor at Virginia Tech. He made a lasting impact on my education and life. He truly cared about all of his students and wanted us all to succeed. He was a great man and will be missed. My prayers are with the family.

Jeremy Osten - August 09, 2021 at 09:05 PM

DG

“ *Dr. Durrill is the reason I majored in Chemistry at Radford University. He was a great teacher - incredibly smart and funny and kind. He was always available to help students and always ready with a joke and a smile. Such a wonderful and unique person. My sincere condolences to his family.*

Dennis Grove - August 09, 2021 at 04:42 PM



“ *Guiding Light Bouquet was purchased for the family of Preston Lee Durrill.*



August 09, 2021 at 03:29 PM

MR

“ *Dr. Durrill was my first chemical engineering professor at Virginia Tech in the Fall of 2018, and I'll never forget how welcome he made me feel in the department. He was so passionate about helping students succeed, and he always made learning fun. He was an incredible man, engineer, and teacher, and I'm so lucky I got to work with him. He will always be remembered at VT!*

Mackenzie Roach - August 09, 2021 at 02:23 PM

SS

“ *So blessed to have known you and been taught by you. You were a comfort and guiding hand to so many students, myself included.*

Sara Saihati - August 09, 2021 at 11:30 AM

MH

“Wow. What a legend. I completely credit this man for shifting my Chemistry interest from "least favorite subject" to "hmm, yea seems pretty cool, I think I'd like to be a Chemical Engineer." While I know that I am not unique in feeling indebted to this man for his positive influence on my life, I feel privileged for having known and learned from him.

Martha Hay - August 08, 2021 at 04:27 PM

SL

“Preston was a challenging and beloved professor, an outstanding administrator, and a valued colleague and friend. I also remember him as a wonderful teammate on some excellent softball teams in the 1970s and '80s. Most of all, he was a genuinely good person, always willing to share a smile and a friendly word. He is the kind of guy whose picture should be next to the word "gentleman" in the dictionary. We send our sincere condolences to Lorraine and the Durrill family.

Steve and Eileen Lerch - August 08, 2021 at 01:10 PM

JM

“Lorraine, it has been such a long time since we've seen each other. I am so sorry to hear of Preston's passing. I lost my husband in 2012 and younger son in 2020. It is always sad to lose a loved one. Know that I am thinking of you and your family.

Jan Marks - August 08, 2021 at 10:00 AM



“ *Blue Caribbean Bouquet was purchased for the family of Preston Lee Durrill.*



August 07, 2021 at 11:50 PM



“ *I worked with Preston at Virginia Tech. He was the most wonderful colleague, and his students absolutely loved him. He always brought a friendly smile to his work, and a spring in his step. I will miss him.*

Paul Deck - August 07, 2021 at 02:47 PM



“ *I had the honor of knowing Preston for 35 years. He was a great teacher, mentor and friend to his colleagues in the department and a generation of Virginia Tech students. I was lucky enough to see him just a few days before he passed, and I got to grab him into a hug and tell him how much I had missed him. It is hard to believe we have lost this wonderful soul. The world is a poorer place without him.*

Dave Cox - August 07, 2021 at 08:07 AM

SM

“*Dr. Durrill was a kind, selfless man and a world class teacher. I feel so honored that I was able to learn from him during my time at Virginia Tech. He lived talking about everything from chemistry to his beloved grandchildren and he will be missed as a staple to the Virginia Tech Chemical Engineering Department. My condolences to his family, friends, and students.*”



Suzanne Murphy - August 07, 2021 at 02:08 AM

AK

“ Dr. Durrill was without a doubt the biggest influence of anyone in my years at Virginia Tech. I had the privilege of being a student in two of his classes. In general chemistry, I could see his love for the subject as he stood in front of a classroom of hundreds, always excited to teach the class and even do wacky chemistry demos in front of us. In mass and energy balances, the introduction course for all chemical engineering majors, he showed that he wanted every single one of his students to succeed by making sure everyone understood what he was teaching, even offering much of his time after class to privately help you one on one. Outside of the classroom, he was an amazing and kind soul, someone you could go and talk to about anything and everything. It's no surprise that we ChemEs used to all see him as the grandfather we wanted. I'm so, so lucky that I got to know him and spend the time I did with him while at school, and he will definitely be someone I remember for the rest of my life as I go through my own career. I credit my career path and my enjoyment of going through the ChemE major to this man. He will be missed by all, and may he rest in peace.

- Aaron K
VT '18

Aaron K - August 06, 2021 at 10:25 PM



“ Yellow Sunflowers (Silk Cemetery Flowers) was purchased for the family of Preston Lee Durrill.



August 06, 2021 at 09:49 PM

DW

“ No single person has had the effect on my academic or professional career the way Dr. Durrill did. My first year at VT, I took his introductory chemical engineering class, Mass and Energy Balances. I was struggling to adapt to life at a large university and my grades reflected that. I should've failed that class, that's not a point of opinion it's a matter of fact: my final grade was going to be a 58. For in major courses, I needed at least a C- and I wasn't going to get it. Before my final, I went to Dr. Durrill and he told me he would give me a C- if I passed the final. I got a 48. He asked me if I thought I could do the remaining coursework and I said I could if given the opportunity. He gave me the C- anyways and told me to come to him for any help I needed along the way. I graduated from Virginia Tech because of this man and with his LOR I was accepted to Auburn's MBA program last year and thus far have a 4.0. Dr. Durrill gave me a chance where most wouldn't. He kept me on track in school and beyond. What made this man so unique and special is he did his best, like this, for every single one of his students. He was the grandfather you wish you had, a model educator, embodied VT's motto of Ut Prosim, and will be dearly dearly missed.



Dylan Whitaker - August 06, 2021 at 09:42 PM

 Emily
Tong

“ I was fortunate to be in one of Dr. Durrill’s chemistry classes my freshman year at Virginia Tech, and I remember everybody would stay all the way to the end of class to see what entertaining experiment he’d show us that day. Dr. Durrill had a way with keeping everyone engaged and also making sure we knew we were supported. Even though he wasn’t my academic advisor, he always made time to answer my questions and to help me plan my courses. Dr. Durrill was an extraordinary person and will be greatly missed. His generosity, humility, and great sense of humor has made a great impact on myself and many others.

Rest In Peace.

-Emily Tong, VT ‘16

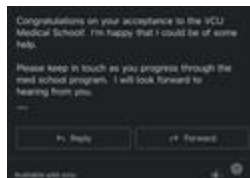
Emily Tong - August 06, 2021 at 06:45 PM

KH

“ I was one of Dr. Durrill’s students during my time at VT and had kept in touch with him throughout these last several years. He helped mentor me and write my recommendation letter to medical school, of which I just had my white coat ceremony for today. He had even sent me a congratulations just a few months ago. I wish I could have shared this picture with him, but instead I will leave this here to let everyone know what a great and wonderful person Dr. Durrill was. He inspired me to never give up on my dreams and aspirations and I will never forget him for that. Rest in Peace.

- Kevin Han

VT '15



Kevin Han - August 06, 2021 at 04:52 PM