

Dr. Kenneth V. Luza (Sept. 26, 1945–July 23, 2014)

Dr. Kenneth V. Luza, the longest-serving member of the Oklahoma Geological Survey (OGS) staff, passed away Wednesday morning, July 23, in Norman after a brief illness. He is survived by his wife Margaret and son David.

Ken received his B.S. in Geological Engineering from the University of Arizona in 1967, and then earned his M.S. in Geological Engineering (1969) and his Ph.D. in Geology (1972) from the South Dakota School of Mines and Technology. In 1972 he joined the Nevada Bureau of Mines and Geology, where he worked on engineering and environmental problems in the Reno and Las Vegas areas. In 1975, he took a position as Engineering Geologist with the OGS.

During his career, Ken worked in all areas of Oklahoma, and he studied and wrote on almost all aspects of Oklahoma geology. His Oklahoma-related projects included: the study of earthquakes, the Meers Fault in the Wichita Mountains, tectonics of the Nemaha Ridge, geothermal resources, industrial minerals, and waste disposal; and he spearheaded the Survey's efforts at trying to bring the nation's planned Superconductor Super Collider to Oklahoma.

However, his most important studies were on the hazardous hydrologic and ground-subsidence problems associated with abandoned underground lead/zinc mines in Ottawa County of northeast Oklahoma. This area, the Picher Field of the Tri-State Mining District, was once the World's leading producer of lead and zinc. Emission of water from the underground mines, abandoned by 1970, and the large mounds of mining waste ("chat" piles) left at the surface, led to surface-water contamination at the Tar Creek Superfund Site—one of the Nation's most toxic locations, requiring major reclamation and restoration efforts.

His work in the Picher Field involved the following: study of water contamination, preparing maps showing the distribution of underground mines, identifying and evaluating the condition and potential hazard of all mine shafts (more than 1,000 shafts), evaluating the numerous sites of ground failure and collapse, and contributing in many ways to resolving problems associated with these issues. He worked closely with the people living in the area, and cared deeply about their problems and helping them through the difficult transition period. He worked both with his professional knowledge base, but also with his heart.

In addition to his work for OGS, Ken also served on the graduate faculty at The University of Oklahoma, supervising graduate students in the fields of Geology and Geophysics, Civil Engineering, and Geological Engineering. His professional service included membership in the following organizations: Geological Society of America, American Institute of Mining Engineers, Association of Engineering Geologists (AEG), American Institute of Professional Geologists (AIPG), Shallow Exploration Drillers Clinic, and Oklahoma Board of Geographic Names (OBGI); he served as Chair of the OBGI and as an officer in the Oklahoma Sections of both the AEG and the AIPG.

Ken was a prolific writer, having authored or co-authored more than 150 publications. He also gave many lectures to technical and public-interest groups, mainly summarizing his

research on earthquakes, seismicity, and tectonics, and on problems in the Picher lead/zinc mining district and the Tar Creek Superfund Site.

He will be missed by all who knew him, not only for his important contributions to Oklahoma as a geologist, but also for his sly wit and humor. A long-time Survey staff member noted "If Ken Luza told you something, you could take that to the bank. He didn't say things he wasn't sure about. And he was sure of, and right about, so much in this State."

Despite his declining health, Ken worked until his last days to complete his investigations.

The OGS Staff and the Mewbourne College would like to express our deepest sympathy to the family and friends who share this loss. Ken will be missed as a geologist and as a friend, and will not be forgotten.