

Obituary: Ken MacGregor

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We are deeply saddened to hear of the death of Emeritus Professor Ken MacGregor, who passed away from Covid-19 on 17 June 2020. Ken joined the University of Cape Town in 1974 and was Head of the Computer Science Department at UCT for more than 30 of his 38 years of service to our university. He built up the department from its inception to the world-class department it is today.

Passionate and committed to computing, to his staff and to his students, he was one of UCT's best-known professors – whose sense of humour, larger than life personality and Scottish accent were as legendary as his sense of fairness and his integrity. His knowledge of UCT and its people, his strategic thinking and innovative nature, were at the heart of the department's success over the years. Under his guidance the department grew in size and stature, its degrees became internationally accredited, an industrial advisory board was established, and his students left their mark on research and industry both locally and abroad.

His contribution to the South African Computer Science academic community was recognized by the SAICSIT institute with a special Pioneer Award in 2011. Ken was one of the founding members of SAICSIT, the South African Institute of Computer Scientists and Information Technologists, and also a long-time member of the International Federation of Information Processing's WG2.4 on Systems Implementation Technology, where his refreshing presentations and discussions were remembered by all. Ken published numerous conference and journal papers, predominantly in the field of distributed computing. His computer science interests and expertise extended well beyond this, and his considerable contribution to postgraduate supervision spans an impressive range of subjects and students, such as Mark Shuttleworth and many other noteworthy achievers. Ken was instrumental in forging successful careers for hundreds of students, and remained in touch with many long after their graduation.

Ken was innovative not only as an educator and researcher, he was also a pioneer in the computer industry, and always keen to work with emerging IT companies. After retirement he continued to run his own computer company and collaborate in local and international research. A prominent figure in the Cape Town Computer Society, he was known for many years as Mr Unix and as an evangelical supporter of free and open source software. Thanks to his outgoing, friendly, highly entertaining and often irreverent sense of fun, he was extremely well-known not only within but also far beyond university circles.

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Ken was a keen golfer in his later years, and a keen soccer player in his earlier days, and earned his colours playing football for UCT. He loved the outdoors and travel. He continued to pursue these interests after retiring from UCT, and had recently returned from trips to St Petersburg, the Galapagos islands and Paris. Ken was a loving and devoted father and grandfather to his daughter Linda and her children, and a loving and devoted partner to Joan Rapp, Emeritus Director of UCT Libraries. A kind, supportive and vibrant man, father, partner, colleague and professor, he leaves a huge gap in the lives of so many whose careers and friendships he blessed, and he will be sorely missed.