

THE UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

Adopted by the Regents
May 15, 2008

Regents Communication

ACTION REQUEST

Subject: Report of Faculty Death

Action Requested: Adoption of Memorial Statement

Michael Bretz, professor of physics, died on April 10, 2008, after a long fight with cancer. He was 70 years old.

A distinguished low-temperature physicist well known for his work on quasi two-dimensional systems, Professor Bretz received his B.S. degree from the University of California, Los Angeles, in 1961 and his Ph.D. degree from the University of Washington in 1971. He joined the University of Michigan faculty in 1973 as an assistant professor and was promoted to associate professor in 1977 and professor in 1986.

Professor Bretz's best known work was on the physics of adsorbed films, particularly on graphite substrates. He performed extremely precise measurements of heat capacities, permitting studies of very thin adsorbed layers. He did influential experiments on phase transitions of rare gases in these conditions, which can be thought of as a direct realization of the two-dimensional Potts model, an area of considerable theoretical interest. His pioneering work on graphite preceded the explosion of activity on fullerenes, though he remained keenly interested in these developments throughout his career. He later worked on avalanches in granular materials and water droplets. His work on sound-producing ("booming") sands included a field-trip to record the sounds, and led to an article in *Scientific American*.

Professor Bretz was a dedicated, sympathetic, and humane teacher; he supervised the doctoral theses of five graduate students, all of whom have had successful scientific careers. His enthusiasm and wry humor communicated itself in his classroom teaching, and he was active in introducing new concepts into the curriculum. His colleagues will miss Professor Bretz's friendly presence, his dedication to science, and his boundless curiosity about the natural world. As we mourn the loss of our beloved colleague, we extend our condolences to his wife, Margaret, their two children, and four grandchildren.

Requested by:



Sally J. Churchill

Vice President and Secretary of the University

May 2008