

Professor Kalevi Pihlaja

A Tribute



Kalevi Pihlaja was born on February 13, 1940 in the small Western Finnish town of Aura, on the beautiful River Aurajoki. Since graduating from the local school, his life and work has been tightly bound to the nearby Turku, the second largest city of Finland, and to the University of Turku. After defending his doctoral thesis in physical organic chemistry in 1968, he was appointed Docent in Physical Organic Chemistry at the University of Turku, followed by election to a full professorship in physical chemistry in 1978. From 1981 to 1986, Professor Pihlaja served as Dean of the Faculty of Mathematics and Natural Sciences at the University of Turku.

Professor Kalevi Pihlaja is one of the founding fathers of physical organic chemistry in Finland and in Northern Europe. His pioneering work in reaction kinetics and thermochemistry initiated the use of a quantitative approach in the description of the reactivity of organic compounds. This work was soon extended to novel methods in the structural and conformational analysis of molecules. During the past 20 years, Professor Pihlaja has developed a world-leading laboratory in structural chemistry, famous for its top-class work in mass spectrometry and NMR structural analysis. The scientific excellence of Professor Pihlaja and his group has attracted organic chemists from many countries to Turku. In particular, mention should be made of the long-time collaboration with synthetic chemists from Hungary (Albert Szent-Györgyi Medical University and Jozsef Attila University in Szeged, reunified in 2000 as the University of Szeged), Slovakia (Comenius University of Bratislava, University of Košice and the Slovak Academy of Sciences), Germany (University of Potsdam), Turkey (University of Izmit) and Poland (Universities of Lublin and Gdańsk).

Professor Pihlaja has also had a very strong long-time collaboration with Finnish industry. As the main coordinator of peat research in Finland, he has served as President of The Finnish Peatland Society. The peat industry is one of the most important natural resource-based industries in Finland. This has additionally induced Professor Pihlaja's outstanding contributions to environmental chemistry. Besides his scientific achievements in this field, Kalevi has developed a full teaching program in environmental sciences at the University of Turku, a major part of which was later transferred through a European Union Tempus project to the University of Tartu in neighboring Estonia.

Professor Kalevi Pihlaja has been a most successful educator and propagator of science. More than 20 doctoral theses have been defended under his supervision. He has also been the main organizer of numerous scientific conferences and meetings in the fields of structural analysis and synthetic and environmental chemistry. He has lectured in more than 20 countries, including Japan and New Zealand. He holds honorary doctorships in pharmacology from Albert Szent-Györgyi Medical University, Hungary (1989) and in physics from the University of St. Petersburg, Russia (2000). In Finland, Professor Pihlaja has occupied numerous important positions of trust in science and education. He has been a Member of the Finnish Academy of Sciences since 1982. In 1995, Kalevi Pihlaja was decorated with The Badge of First Class Knight of the Knights of the White Rose by Finnish President Ahtisaari.

Kalevi is now 60 and full of vitality. He is unbelievably active in his science, but he is also a good father to his daughters and a good husband; moreover, he likes fishing and spending good times with his friends from all over the world. Throughout his whole life, Professor Kalevi Pihlaja has been a most outstanding community member. Among others, he has been President of the Turku Club of the Friends of Nature, and President of Turku Kupittaa Rotary Club.

Facilitators

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