



Caplenor Faculty Research Award

Dr. Charles Donald Caplenor was named Associate Vice President for Research and Dean of Instructional Development at Tennessee Tech in 1976 and was an exceptional teacher and passionate researcher. His dedication and outstanding commitment toward building a firmer research foundation at the University were evident in his skillful development and management of research and special projects. Dr. Caplenor's efforts led to the creation of an award in his honor in 1984. The Caplenor Faculty Research Award is given to faculty who are engaged in outstanding research while employed at the University, and the winner receives a monetary award and a listing on a permanent plaque displayed in Derryberry Hall. As of 2016, 37 faculty have received the award, which has become the premiere recognition of faculty scholarship and creativity at TTU.

Dr. Caplenor was born in Lebanon, Tennessee, and from Smith County High School went on to earn a master's degree in Biology-Chemistry from Peabody College in Nashville in 1948 and his Ph.D. in Biology-Biochemistry from Vanderbilt University in 1954. Through his academic tenure, he also served as the Dean of the College of Arts

and Sciences at TTU from 1966 to 1970 and was named as temporary Acting Director of the \$5 million Joe L. Evins Appalachian Center for Craft. The Appalachian Center for Craft is part of the TTU campus and is located on more than 500 wooded acres overlooking Center Hill Lake in scenic Middle Tennessee, near the town of Smithville. The Center has a rich history of producing successful studio and production artists, elementary school to college-level art educators, and nationally and internationally renowned craft artists. His task as Acting Center Director included leading program research, program planning and curriculum development. Dr. Caplenor also published numerous refereed journal articles in the *Journal of the Tennessee Academy of Science*, the *Ecology* journal, *ASB Bulletin*, *Mississippi Geological Survey Bulletin*, among others. During his career, Dr. Caplenor served as a member of Sigma Xi, the Tennessee Academy of Science (holding positions as both editor and secretary), the Ecological Society of America, the Botanical Society of America, and the Association of Southeastern Biologists.

Dr. Caplenor symbolized the essence of teaching and research for which our faculty are well known. He was "trained to be a scientist, and he practiced his science with all the intellectual rigor attendant to his profession. But he also had the feeling of a poet and artist," said former TTU President Arliss Roaden. According to others, "teaching for [Dr. Caplenor] was as natural as his breathing."

At the age of 57, Dr. Caplenor passed away on a field trip doing what he loved best—teaching students. His sudden death was caused by a heart attack while on a scenic point at Fall Creek Falls, which was later designated as "Caplenor Point." His love for the area was unyielding and he shared his knowledge of it with many young minds, showing his students that nature is the great teacher. A story told about him encapsulated this basis on which Dr. Caplenor lived his life. One of his administrative associates said that he and Dr. Caplenor were rooming together at a conference in

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Atlanta when he asked Dr. Caplenor the name of a tree outside the hotel window. Dr. Caplenor proceeded to tell him the tree was a Ginkgo, or Maiden Hair Tree, and that it

was significant for its durability. He said that the tree was perhaps the oldest of trees and could be traced back through prehistoric fossils. Dr. Caplenor also told him of the legends associated with the tree. At the end of the discourse, the roommate was reported to say, "Thanks, Don, but all I wanted to know was the name of the tree."