



**Ertle Thompson**  
**1929 – 2012**

Fellow 1979, President 1982-83,  
Ivey Lewis Distinguished Service 1989

The Academy has lost one of its greatest supporters. Dr. Ertle Thompson, 83, passed peacefully into the arms of his Savior on Tuesday, June 5, 2012.

He was born on March 30, 1929 in a small farmhouse in Feds Creek, KY. He was the son of the late Benjamin Harrison Thompson and Bertha Rowe Thompson. Ertle grew up in the coal fields of Eastern Kentucky, where no one ever imagined his early hunger for knowledge would take him so far from home and grow into such a successful career in the field of Science Education. After completing his undergraduate studies at the University of Kentucky, he began his teaching career in Southwest Virginia. Teaching science quickly became his life's passion, and he moved his family to Charlottesville in 1957 to continue his graduate studies, earning both his Master's and Doctorate degrees in Science Education from the University of Virginia. While his distinguished career and loving family took him from his humble beginnings into 46 states, he chose to remain a professor at the University of Virginia until his retirement in 2001; but he never forgot his roots as he remained forever a University of Kentucky Wildcats Basketball Fan.

Ertle's work as a Professor of Science in the UVA Curry School of Education

spanned decades. During that time, he was instrumental in turning science into a fun and interactive way of learning that was contagious. He served as science advisor to several state governors and textbook publishers, and a mentor to hundreds of science teachers throughout the country. He was recognized often as an outstanding leader in many professional science organizations, including the National Association of Science Teachers, the Association for the Education of Science Teachers, the Virginia Academy of Sciences and the Appalachian Mathematical Sciences Partnership. Although most of his career was focused on helping teachers, his most enjoyable work was judging high school science fairs - discovering and encouraging talented young people to pursue their dreams.

Dr. Thompson has served in the trenches of science education. He has taught in the secondary schools of Buchanan County, at Clinch Valley College, and at the University of Virginia. He has been a leader in the promotion of science teaching through his work with the Association for the Education of Teachers of Science, serving as President in 1979-1980; with the National Science teachers Association Board of Directors; and with the National Association for Research in Science Teaching, serving as President in 1984-85. Over and over again he has been called upon to counsel publishers of science textbooks, school districts, and state departments of education. The spreading of his influence may perhaps best be glimpsed by the results of his National Science Foundation training grants for science teachers, through which 8,000 participants received rejuvenating instruction, more than 800 earned masters degrees, and over 50 advanced towards their doctoral degrees.

In the field of science education, Dr. Thompson has kept abreast of the latest developments, contributing a steady stream of addresses and publications to the work of his professional associations and to ad hoc panels and conferences. It is perhaps surprising to those who do not know him well that so busy a man could find the time to be a mover and shaker in the Virginia Academy of Science. From the time of his initial appointment as a member of the VAS Advisory Panel on science Education in 1955, Ertle Thompson has almost continually held office of some kind in the Academy. He has served on the Membership Committee, the Virginia Junior Academy Committee, and the Science Advisory Committee, where he was instrumental in preparing the 1982 report on Science, Engineering and Technology Resources in Virginia. It was inevitable that Dr. Thompson should become the President of the Virginia Academy for 1982-83. He has been the Science Advisor to the Governor and has represented him on the National Governors Council on Science and Technology. He has served as the Academy delegate to the AAAS, in which capacity he was elected President of the National Association of Academies of Science, 1985-86 and Chairman of Section Y, General Interest in Science and Engineering 1988-89.

Ertle Thompson has been recognized nationally for his contributions to science education. He has received the National Science Teachers Association Citation for Distinguished Service to Science Education and the Distinguished Service Award of the National Association of Academies of Science.