

Popular UW-Madison soil science professor Hole dies at 88

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He passionately taught his students to appreciate and enjoy the dirt beneath their feet.

By Lisa Schuetz

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A man who spent much of his life passionately pointing out the intricacies of soil died Tuesday.

Francis D. Hole, 88, emeritus

professor of geography and soil science at UW-Madison, was diagnosed in 1996 with prostate cancer. A Quaker, he called it a spiritual signal and "love letter from the Divine."

He was born Aug. 25, 1913, in Muncie, Ind. He received a



Hole

bachelor's degree in geology and biology from Indiana's Earlham College in 1933, a master's degree in French from Pennsylvania's Haverford College in 1934, and a doctorate in soil science and geography from UW-Madison in 1943.

Among UW-Madison's most popular teachers, he joined its staff in 1946, starting a long career teaching others to appreciate what he called their "Earth birthright," an awareness of the soil and

enjoyment of it.

He used poetic, romantic terms to describe soil, often using a battered violin, soil auger and suitcase of puppets while performing songs, poems and plays about dirt.

In a 1994 interview, Hole said that one should listen to one's feet to help appreciate what's underneath. " 'Oh, this is hard stone. Oh, this is cushiony carpet.' The soles of the feet are enjoying it all, but they generally are not being heard by the rest of the body."

He led a successful grass-roots campaign in 1983 to name Antigo silt loam Wisconsin's state soil.

The gentlemanly Hole disliked gambling, specifically the state lottery, calling it "dishonest and wasteful" in a 1992 letter to the Wisconsin State Journal. He was devoted to nonviolence throughout his life.

Friends plan to hold a memorial service in early February.