

In Memoriam: Heinz Oberhummer (1941 – 2015)

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(Received August 14, 2016)

We mourn the loss of an extraordinary human being. The austrian nuclear physicist Heinz Oberhummer, who had organized the very first Nuclei in the Cosmos conference in the spa town of Baden near Vienna in 1990, unexpectedly passed away at the age of 74 years in November 2015.

Originally coming from the rural town of Obertauern in the Austrian alps, now a well-known ski resort, he studied physics and mathematics at the nearby University of Graz, Austria. Soon after, he joined the Institute of Nuclear Research (Atominstytut) of the Austrian Universities and started teaching at the Vienna University of Technology, where he became professor of theoretical nuclear physics later.

While his initial research interests revolved around the nuclear interaction and the theory of direct reactions, he became active in Nuclear Astrophysics in the late 80s. Among other works, his favorite topic turned out to be the apparent fine-tuning of the strong nuclear force to provide the Hoyle state in ^{12}C at an energy allowing for carbon-based life in the Universe [1].

In his later career he more and more focused on his other main interest, teaching and popularizing science. An undergraduate textbook [2] and an EU grant for an international collaboration to develop a computer-based course on astronomy for schools and universities were the first successes in this endeavor. He was well known among students to be a good natured, easily approachable professor, a good mentor, and a great motivator, whose enthusiasm for science in general and nuclear astrophysics specifically was extremely contagious. He managed to translate this enthusiasm also into countless popular science talks and publications. After his university retirement, his activity in this area increased even more and he became very popular among the public with an award-winning science (and comedy) show on stage, touring Austria and Germany, as well as with numerous TV appearances and several popular science books.

Heinz will not only be remembered due to his science, his enthusiasm, and seemingly endless energy, but also as being a good-natured, easygoing person, who was able to quickly drop any formalities and to talk with everybody on an eye-to-eye level. His social skills, which included singing and playing the guitar at social conference evenings, helped him to quickly establish many contacts and to fondly stay in the memory of anybody who ever met him, even if they did not know all facets of his activities. He was taken from us while still being very actively involved in many projects and this unexpected departure is a great bereavement.

References

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- [2] H. Oberhummer: *Kerne und Sterne: Einfh rung in die Nukleare Astrophysik* (Barth, Heidelberg 1993).