

# Obituary

Dr William (Bill) R. Davidson: 1947–2009



Mass spectrometry has sadly lost one of its most influential figures with the recent passing of William (Bill) Davidson after several months of illness.

Bill was a PhD graduate from the laboratory of Paul Kebarle at the University of Alberta, where he acquired the expertise in the physical chemistry of ion-molecule reactions that stood him in good stead in his long career. He joined Sciex in 1978 and very quickly became a key part of the early success of that company, contributing to the hardware development and writing some of the first application software (on a PDP8 computer!) for the TAGA (Trace Atmospheric Gas Analyzer). This instrument incorporated an APCI ion source and the first commercially available triple-quadrupole analyzer. Mobile versions mounted on a truck are still in use to monitor air quality, especially in the event of environmental accidents.

Bill soon became the Manager and later Vice-President of the research group at Sciex, hiring young scientists and building the group into a premier center of scientific activity

and development in Canada. His vision and leadership contributed greatly to development of the Aromatic System (used as a non-invasive inspection system for air cargo) and in 1989 the API III LC/MS/MS system. The latter pioneered the commercialization of reliable LC/MS/MS instruments for biomedical and other applications, and was the basis of the subsequent commercial success of Sciex.

Bill's *modus operandi* was to promote the importance of 'over the horizon' research at Sciex, providing an environment of investigative spirit that fostered the development of many of the company's technologies and products. His leadership in ensuring the recognition and promotion of scientists within the company, providing a parallel route of advancement that did not require entering the management stream, has had a long-term benefit and engendered an intense loyalty among his colleagues.

At the same time he developed an extensive network of collaborations and interactions with Canadian and international Universities and research institutes that provided the company with exposure to many new scientific advances and technologies. The present writer was involved in such a collaboration for several years and, latterly as manager of a research institute, tried to emulate Bill's approach to the apparently oxymoronic art of 'scientific management'. Briefly, Bill would discuss the general goals of a project with a colleague, make a few suggestions, then leave his colleague to get on with it, subject only to occasional updates on progress when he provided gentle direction with maximum freedom for innovation. In other words he treated his colleagues with confidence and respect, and this treatment also applied to his many collaborators outside the company. His later role in business and technology development grew from his extensive contacts in the larger scientific community, where his scientific knowledge and judgment were greatly respected.

On a more personal level, Bill Davidson was a gentleman of considerable gravitas who treated everyone with the same old-fashioned courtesy spiced with a dry sense of humour. He will be greatly missed.

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