A few thoughts about Werner Zimmt  
By Don Slack ABE Head 1991-2009 and 2012-2014

In 1991, not long after I became department head, one of our adjunct professors, Dr. Stuart Hoenig, brought a friend to visit me. The friend was Dr. Werner Zimmt, who had recently retired from DuPont after working there for over thirty years as a Research Polymer Chemist. Werner was interested in obtaining an adjunct appointment in ABE rather than Chemistry because he said he thought our work would be more interesting to him since he had done Chemistry all his life. So we introduced him to the faculty, who unanimously voted to offer him an adjunct position. Werner thus became an active member of the ABE faculty, a post which he held from 1991 until he passed away last week. That made him the third longest serving active faculty member after Muluneh Yitayew and me.

Werner approached his appointment in ABE with gusto. He decided early on that he wanted to work with graduate students and junior faculty and he became a valuable mentor for both. When he came on board in 1992 or 93, Chris Choi gave Werner a desk in his lab and Werner worked there with both Chris and his grad students. I remember Werner providing the needed chemistry know-how to help develop a “hot-foam” for frost protection of fruit trees in one of Chris’s early projects.

Werner attended the weekly Monday graduate seminars more regularly than any other faculty member. He always sat at the front of the room, listened attentively and always asked probing and thoughtful questions. The students became a little afraid of him… afraid that he would ask questions they couldn’t answer… and he often did, but in the end, he always became their mentor and friend. He very patiently read many drafts of many thesis and dissertations and offered suggestions and corrections to all. He met weekly with many of my graduate students and those of other faculty members. While I was head, he would always come to my office at 11am (one hour before seminar) and visit about the department, the students, the faculty, staff and interesting research questions until time for seminar.

At the age of 85, Werner went to spend a semester with one of the Universities in China with whom we had a memorandum of agreement, Yunnan Agricultural University in Kunming.
He taught Polymer Chemistry while there but, more importantly to him, he also taught a large number of Chinese students English. And, of course, Werner learned to speak Chinese as well.

When Mark Riley joined the department in 1998, Werner became a mentor to both Mark and his students. Since Mark had his Ph.D. in Bio-Chemical Engineering, Werner had, at last, found someone who understood some of his thinking. Werner helped mentor virtually all of Mark’s grad students.

There is no doubt that Werner was a very great asset to the Department and one that we will not be able to replace… at any cost. He was a very unique individual, to whom retirement did not mean “retirement” but a new opportunity to do new things, work in new areas, and discover new friends and new challenges.