



In memoriam: Thomas J. Grizzard Jr., professor emeritus of civil and environmental engineering and urban water cycle expert

June 28, 2017



Thomas J. Grizzard, Jr.

Thomas J. Grizzard, Jr., professor emeritus of civil and environmental engineering in the [College of Engineering](#) at Virginia Tech and former director of the [Occoquan Watershed Monitoring Laboratory](#), died unexpectedly on June 24. He was 70.

“Our hearts are heavy with the news of Tom’s passing,” said G. Don Taylor, the Charles O. Gordon Professor of Industrial and Systems Engineering and interim dean of the College of Engineering. “As a Hokie through-and-

through and a pioneer for our college in the National Capital Region, he has left his mark on this university. Our thoughts go out to his family and friends during this difficult time.”

Born in Richmond, Virginia, on August 23, 1946, Grizzard was an expert in the urban water cycle and a dedicated member of the Virginia Tech community. After receiving his bachelor’s degree, master’s degree, and Ph.D. from Virginia Tech, Grizzard would go on to work as a professor and the director of the Occoquan Watershed Monitoring Laboratory at the university from 1974 to 2014 – an impressive 40-year span that included three decades also serving as director for civil and environmental engineering graduate programs in the National Capital Region.

So influential was his work at the Occoquan Watershed Monitoring Laboratory that he would come to be known throughout the National Capital Region as “the protector of the Occoquan.”

“The magnitude of Tom’s impact across the board would be hard to overstate. He was a pioneer in safe reclaimed drinking water right here in the D.C. area and worldwide; he brought Virginia Tech’s civil engineering graduate programs to Northern Virginia; helped design and open our Northern Virginia Center in Falls Church; and brought his energy, insight, devotion, enthusiasm, and infectious laugh to everything he did,” said Steve McKnight, vice president for the National Capital Region. “His many friends, colleagues, employees, students, mentees, and collaborators cannot imagine Virginia Tech in the NCR without Tom.”

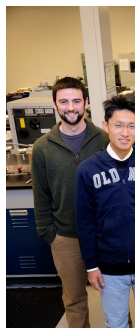
Initially, Grizzard began his undergraduate studies at Virginia Tech in the College of Architecture before transferring into the College of Engineering to study civil engineering. While an undergraduate, Grizzard supported himself by working as the headmaster of the Virginia Tech athletic dormitory, where he formed lifelong friendships with other notable alumni, such as Jim Richards, Scott Dawson, and Gene Fisher.

Richards remembers this time as an endless back-and-forth of pranks, including jumping out of dorm room wardrobes to scare each other and even once bringing a massive, but ultimately harmless, snake into the dorm.

“He was an intellectual, smart guy, but he liked to have a good time,” Richards said, laughing.

Still, Grizzard was also the type to encourage those around him, Richards said. After his time at Virginia Tech, Richards went on to pursue professional football and spent time in the military. Grizzard stayed in touch, and convinced Richards to come back to school to get his master’s degree.

“And that’s just the kind of guy he was,” Richards said. “He was just a good friend who cared about me and I cared about him.”



Grizzard with students at the Occoquan Watershed Monitoring Laboratory.

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Grizzard received his B.S. in 1968 and accepted a position with the U.S Army Engineer District in Norfolk, Virginia. While with the Corps of Engineers, he worked on a variety of assignments, culminating with a position in water resources, where he developed an interest in watershed planning and management.

In 1971, Grizzard returned to Virginia Tech as a graduate student in sanitary engineering. During his studies, he conducted research in the Upper Roanoke River Watershed on the relative magnitude of various watershed pollution sources. After receiving his M.S. degree in 1972, he elected to continue his graduate work in the civil engineering Ph.D. program.

During his Ph.D. studies, which he completed in 1977, Grizzard's research focused on the water quality impacts of nutrient cycling from deposited lake and reservoir sediments. Working again in the Roanoke River Watershed, he developed methods for predicting the downstream water quality effects of nutrient sources.

In 1974, while still a Ph.D. student, Grizzard joined the Virginia Tech civil engineering department as director of the Occoquan Watershed Monitoring Laboratory in Manassas, Virginia, a position he held until his retirement in 2014.

“The Virginia Tech family, and the civil and environmental engineering department in particular, has lost a great friend, highly talented colleague, and a lifelong Hokie. Tom’s contributions to safe and sustainable drinking water in the National Capital Region, the Commonwealth of Virginia, and beyond have been extensive for the past 40 years,” said Sam Easterling, professor and head of the Charles Edward Via Jr. Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering in the College of Engineering at Virginia Tech. “The personal loss that his colleagues feel with his passing is immeasurable. He will be remembered as truly one of the good guys. Our thoughts and well-wishes are with Tom’s family during this enormously difficult time.”

Cliff Randall, Charles P. Lunsford Professor Emeritus and Grizzard’s major Ph.D. advisor, appointed Grizzard as director of the Occoquan Watershed Monitoring Laboratory before Grizzard had even completed his dissertation. Randall said the role was a big one to fill: it required maintaining good relationships with two city councils, four county boards of supervisors, and the boards of directors of both the Fairfax County Water Authority and the Upper Occoquan Sewage Authority.

What’s more, Grizzard was charged with the task of developing and expanding the actual laboratory, Randall said, to turn it into a resource for the entire Washington, D.C., region and for the Virginia State Water Control Board.

“Without a doubt, Tom was the best possible person to fulfill that position. He was one of the most talented and intelligent persons I ever met, and I will always be grateful to him for being my friend, my younger brother, and my colleague. It is impossible to express how much I will miss him,” Randall said.



Grizzard at his retirement party in 2014.

In the early 1980's, Grizzard also helped introduce graduate education in civil and environmental engineering to the National Capital Region. Over the course of his career, he taught over 1,000 students in environmental engineering and science. He advised more than 200 master's degree and Ph.D. students.

It was around this time that Adil Godrej, current director of the Occoquan Watershed Monitoring Laboratory, first met Grizzard. Godrej met him while he was pursuing his master's and kept in touch as he pursued his Ph.D. When it came time to graduate with his doctorate in 1989, Godrej reached out to ask about a job based on a conversation the pair had years before.

"I asked Tom if the offer of a job at the Occoquan Lab was still available, and he said to give him two days and he'd come up with something," Godrej said. "He did, and I started my faculty career in July 1989 as a senior research associate and associate director of the Occoquan Lab."

From there, Godrej and Grizzard developed a lasting friendship outside of their work together. Godrej said they bonded over "a love of books, language (the English language), music, and good food."

"He was not only a close friend, but also a marvelous mentor and teacher. His commitment to the public good was unimpeachable, and he communicated that fire to everybody who met him by his actions," Godrej said. "He built the lab up from a single project in 1974 to what it is today: a world-class research center in water research."

Through his teaching, research, and outreach, Grizzard contributed to the sustainability of urban landscapes in Virginia, Maryland, and the District of Columbia, and to the restoration of the Chesapeake Bay.

In recent years, Grizzard served on the commonwealth's licensing board for water and wastewater plant operators and was a member of the Scientific and Technical Advisory Committee to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Chesapeake Bay Program.

Grizzard received external research funding totaling more than \$40 million, with a personal share of almost \$30 million. His research has made substantial contributions to the body of knowledge on the urban water cycle relating to the potable reuse of reclaimed wastewater, the management of drinking water impoundments, and the characterization and control of urban stormwater.

Grizzard was the longest-serving member of the College of Engineering faculty in the National Capital Region. In 2014, he was named professor emeritus, a title recommended for approval by the university president to the Board of Visitors in recognition of exemplary service to the university.

“Tom was a Renaissance man-scientist of the type you don't find much anymore. With his broad knowledge and curiosity in studying anything related to water, he not only contributed greatly to the field, but trained a cadre of students and co-workers who could then go forth and do the same,” Godrej said. “The work of his life is magnified in the people he taught and trained, and it perpetuates itself through them even though he is gone.”

Grizzard is survived by his wife, Marilyn "Lynn" White Grizzard; two children, Jennifer and Joshua; and four grandchildren.

Visitation and memorial services for Grizzard will begin at noon on July 15 at the Grace United Methodist Church at 9750 Wellington Road in Manassas, Virginia.

In lieu of flowers, the family requests donations to organizations Grizzard was particularly fond of: Potters for Peace and/or the Virginia Tech chapter of Engineers Without Borders, both of which have set up donation pages in Grizzard's honor.

Donations to Potters for Peace, in memory of Tom Grizzard, will be used directly for set up, education, training and support of new ceramic pot water filter factories and their operators worldwide. Potters for Peace works with partners around the world, bringing people access to clean drinking water. Contributions can be made at www.pottersforpeace.org through the Tom Grizzard Memorial Fund page or via check sent to:

Potters for Peace
c/o Tom Grizzard Water Filter Memorial Fund
PO Box 113
Dodgeville, WI 53533

Contributions to Engineers Without Borders benefit student projects in Guatemala, Uganda, and the Dominican Republic and can be donated at <https://support.ewb-usa.org/TomGrizzard> or via check, made out to "Engineers Without Borders" with "Virginia Polytechnic Institute Chapter" written in the memo line. Checks can be mailed to the following address:

Engineers Without Borders at VT
Suite 225, Squires Student Center
290 College Avenue
Blacksburg, VA 24060

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