



## Amir Askari

December 23, 1930 - January 15, 2020

AMIR ASKARI, PhD, passed away unexpectedly and peacefully on January 15. He was 89.

Askari loved his family, his academic research community, and the city of Toledo, where he spent nearly half a century as a professor, researcher and administrator at the University of Toledo College of Medicine and Life Sciences. He dedicated his life's work to science. As former chair of the Department of Pharmacology and Experimental Therapeutics for more than 20 years, Askari was mentor to hundreds of researchers and physicians trained over the years at the College. He and the team of scientists he helped recruit brought hundreds of millions of federal research grant dollars to Toledo to advance medical knowledge, train future medical leaders, and decrease human suffering.

At the time of his death, Askari was planning a trip to a scientific conference to share his ideas with colleagues from around the world and to keep up on the newest scientific findings. After his retirement, Askari continued to review and publish scientific articles. He studied and tried to understand, at a molecular level, how the heart muscle works in health and disease.

Askari took pride in the fact that the research field he helped pioneer grew in impact; he celebrated when several of his friends won the Nobel Prize in Chemistry in 1997. When he began winding down his last large grant a few years ago, Askari was the lead investigator on the longest-running program project grant in the history of the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute.

He had a well-developed sense of justice, which he used to address many situations, such as the underrepresentation of women in various science professions. Hours before he died, Askari emailed the president of the University of Toledo after reading a Blade editorial, asking if she was aware that the university had received money from the Sackler family, owners of Purdue Pharma, producer and promoter of opioid painkillers. Askari never received any grant money from Sackler charities himself.

Askari was born in Ahwaz, Iran at a time when it was nearly inconceivable for someone from that place to grow up, go to college in America, and build a distinguished scientific career collaborating with research colleagues around the world.

He was the youngest of four children born to Mohamad Askari, a local judge who settled disagreements over tea, and Tooran Homayouni Askari, a homemaker. Askari nearly died of typhoid fever as a child, during an outbreak that took the life of one of his sisters.

According to family lore, Askari was in high school when one day a teacher came running up to his house with exciting news. Askari was one of the top ten scorers on a test that every schoolboy in the country had taken. Those top ten scorers were all offered government scholarships to go to college in the United States.

Askari made the rounds of all the family elders and friends to say goodbye before he boarded a plane for the first time, for the unimaginably distant and different United States. He did not know if he would ever see his family or homeland again.

Askari and the other Iranian scholarship winners started studying at Georgetown University. Quickly, they realized that their scholarship didn't cover all the expenses of living in Washington, DC. The group transferred to the less-expensive and nearby University of Maryland in College Park. Overwhelmed by that large campus, one of the Iranians told the others about a friend studying at nice smaller institution, the University of Dubuque in Iowa. Askari transferred there.

Askari worked cleaning catfish at a diner to pay expenses not covered by his scholarship. After earning a bachelor of science degree in chemistry in Dubuque, he went on to earn a master's degree in biochemistry from New York University. During his early years in New York, he made ends meet by working nights at a hospital blood bank, where he slept when things were quiet, avoiding the need to pay rent. Askari finished his formal education by obtaining a PhD in biochemistry from the graduate program at Cornell University's medical college, which is based in New York City.

He met his future wife -- a PhD researcher named Augusta Boettcher, who grew up in Cincinnati -- when both were working at the Sloan Kettering Institute for Cancer Research in Manhattan. In an era when multicultural relationships were quite rare, Askari and Boettcher built a marriage with strong mutual respect that lasted more than six decades.

Askari joined the faculty of Cornell's medical college for nearly two decades, before

moving to Toledo in 1976 to chair the pharmacology department at what was then called the Medical College of Ohio. In 1999, Askari won the college's Research Career Achievement Award in recognition of excellence and leadership in research. Although Askari became an emeritus faculty member in 2014, he continued to keep an office at the medical college through November, 2019.

Askari and his wife traveled widely as he collaborated with researchers around the world, including key colleagues in Denmark, Japan, and the country of Georgia. His research focused on a single molecule: sodium, potassium adenosine triphosphatase, an enzyme that transports sodium and potassium ions across cell membranes.

Among Askari's many other awards was the 2008 Distinguished Alumnus award from the alumni association of the Weill Cornell Graduate School of Medical Sciences of Cornell University "in recognition of distinguished, lifelong contributions to biomedical research and education."

Askari and his wife, who also worked as a researcher at Toledo's medical college, lived for decades in Ottawa Hills. They moved to Ohio Living Swan Creek, a senior community, almost four years ago. They enjoyed and financially supported many Toledo cultural institutions, including the Toledo Museum of Art, the Toledo Zoo, the Toledo Symphony, the Toledo Repertoire Theatre and others. The couple also helped several relatives and children of Askari's childhood friends in Iran as those young people attended universities in the United States.

As a husband, father, grandfather, uncle, friend and colleague, Askari was often generous, wise and funny. He is survived by his wife of 62 years, Augusta Askari of Toledo; daughter, Emilia Askari (John Owens) of Franklin, MI; son, Fred Askari (Donna Wicker) of Ann Arbor, MI; grandchildren, Jake Askari (Lena Seino Askari) of Culver City, CA; Melanie Askari (Rishi Sood) of Brooklyn, NY; Alana Askari (Chewy Baumel) of Manhattan, NY; Bryce Owens of Ann Arbor, MI; Leila Owens of Franklin, MI; plus numerous nieces, nephews, other family, and many friends.

A memorial service is planned for 1 p.m. on Sunday, Jan. 26, at Ohio Living Swan Creek, 5916 Cresthaven Ln, Toledo, 43614. A small, private burial service took place on Jan. 17 at Toledo Memorial Park cemetery.

For those wishing to make a memorial donation, the family suggests these tax-deductible options:

\* The Ohio Living Foundation, to help those Swan Creek residents whose lifetime savings

are rapidly depleting, and also Swan Creek employees facing financial emergencies. To donate online, please go to <https://www.ohioliving.org/foundation/donate> Designation: Ohio Living Swan Creek. Tribute: In memory of Amir Askari. Or send checks payable to The Ohio Living Foundation noting "Swan Creek - Amir Askari memorial" to: In Memory of Amir Askari at Swan Creek, The Ohio Living Foundation, 1001 Kingsmill Parkway, Columbus, Ohio 43229. 800-686-7800.

\* The University of Toledo Health Sciences Campus Retirees' Scholarship Fund #1500260 (endowment). This supports students of medicine, pharmacy, nursing and biomedical sciences. To donate online, please go to <https://tinyurl.com/amiraskari> Or send checks payable to University of Toledo Foundation noting "In memory of Amir Askari, UT Health Sciences Campus Retirees' Scholarship, #1500260 (endowment)" to: University of Toledo Foundation, 4510 Dorr St, MS #820, Toledo, OH 43615-4040. For more, contact David Theby at 419-530-2646 or [David.Theby@utoledo.edu](mailto:David.Theby@utoledo.edu).

\* The Biophysical Society, to support a Travel Fellowship that helps the society's members attend its annual meeting. To donate online, please go to <http://bit.ly/biophysicstravel>, then email [hpovich@biophysics.org](mailto:hpovich@biophysics.org) to indicate that your donation was in memory of Amir Askari. Or send checks payable to Biophysical Society, noting "Travel Fellowship - In memory of Amir Askari." Mail to Biophysical Society, 5515 Security Lane, Suite 1110, Rockville, MD 20852. 240-290-5600.

\* Or any charity of the donor's choice.

# Cemetery

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## **Toledo Memorial Park**

6382 Monroe St

Sylvania, OH, 43560

# Comments

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“ I remember your parents well from your wedding, Emilia, so many years ago. They took such care to talk to me and others. Such genuinely open and sincere people. My deepest sympathy to your mother and you and your brother.

**George Waldman** - January 25 at 04:06 PM

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“ Dear Augusta,  
I have learned that Amir is no longer with us. I just want you to know that I will miss his friendly and constructive criticism, his fairness and ethical standards. My deepest and most sincere condolences go to you and your family.  
Natalya Fedosova, Aarhus, Denmark

**Natalya U. Fedosova** - January 24 at 10:10 AM

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“ Lily and Rose Tribute Spray was purchased for the family of Amir Askari.



January 22 at 07:34 PM

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“ Dearest Mrs. Askari, I am so saddened for you for the loss of your husband Amir. Besides being your beloved, what an incredible man. My sympathy to you and all your family. With loving care, Beth Brower Weilant



**Beth Brower Weilant** - January 19 at 04:58 PM