

Obituary: Günther M. Keil (1953–2020)

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On February 18, 2020, Dr. Günther Keil passed away

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unexpectedly, shortly after his retirement. He had worked as a scientist at the Friedrich-Loeffler-Institut (FLI; previously Federal Research Centre for Virus Diseases of Animals) since 1981, first in Tübingen, and since 1995 as deputy director of the Institute of Molecular Virology and Cell Biology on the Isle of Riems.

Günther Keil was born on Nov 12, 1953, in Großenhain, Saxony, but he grew up and spent his school years in Singen, Baden-Württemberg, Germany. He studied biology in Konstanz and graduated in 1978. Already during his doctoral thesis work at the University of Erlangen, he dealt with herpesviruses, which remained his major field of research for a long time. After his diploma thesis with the nestor of German genetic engineering research, Prof. Rolf Knippers, biotechnology and genetic engineering were a particular focus and concern of his work. Starting with Herpesvirus saimiri in Erlangen, he continued his molecular biological work in Tübingen with murine cytomegalovirus as part of basic studies on the molecular characterisation of this model pathogen. He then turned his attention to research on bovine herpesvirus 1. His much-acclaimed contributions included the clarification of the functions of viral structural and non-structural proteins, the development of deletion vaccines, and the improvement of antigen presentation for the induction of optimal T-cell immunity. Meanwhile, he developed the BacMam platform and several other viral-vector-based delivery systems for vaccine production. In later years, he focussed his research activities on African swine fever virus, becoming one of the eminent collaborators of the Global Platform for African Swine Fever and Other Important Diseases of Swine.

More than 100 publications in international journals and several patents related to the bovine herpesvirus 1 vector and new technologies for basic molecular biology testify to his successful scientific work. In addition, he was intensively involved in the training of a large number of young scientists, including international students from many countries, through his guidance and supervision. For many years, he headed the Senate Working Group and the Biosafety Committee at the institute.

Günther actively contributed to the International Committee on Taxonomy of Viruses (ICTV; <http://www.ictvonline.org>). He was among the senior scientists who proposed to change the existing virus species names to non-Latinized binomials and among the fourteen senior scientists who opposed a proposed change to the ICTV definition of virus species. Günther was a long-time editor of *Archives of Virology* in addition to being an ad hoc reviewer for many virology journals.

To all who knew him, Günther was a modest, wise, and thoughtful person while keeping a sense of humour. He was always willing to provide advice and support, and selflessly shared his enormous wealth of experience with others. For many years, he supported the FLI's management in a friendly and always loyal manner.

Günther Keil focussed his life on his family—his son Holger, his late wife Angelika, and his wife Gundi. After his retirement from FLI, he lived in Templin, Brandenburg, Germany. He enjoyed his 'new' life, walking with his dogs as well as reading, photographing, and listening to classical music.

With Günther Keil we lost a committed and highly esteemed scientist. He will be missed by molecular biologists and virologists worldwide. Our sympathy goes to his family, friends, and students.

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