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2010 Nobel Prize in Chemistry winner is celebrated by Ashland Inc.

Dr. Richard Heck reconnects with Wilmington roots

WILMINGTON, Del. – Dr. Richard F. Heck, professor emeritus at the University of Delaware, and an employee of Hercules Incorporated from 1957 to 1971, will be 'coming home' to the Ashland Research Center in Wilmington on Friday, May 27, for a 1 p.m. celebration to recognize his recent acceptance of the 2010 Nobel Prize in Chemistry. The Nobel honor was bestowed jointly to Heck, Dr. Akira Suzuki and Dr. Ei-ichi Negishi for developing new, more efficient ways to link carbon atoms together.

Dr. Heck will gather with several of today's top leaders at the Ashland Research Center to witness the unveiling of a mural plaque that denotes his historic accomplishment as part of the overall history of the center and its activities through the years. Employees and guests will attend a reception in his honor. Among invited participants are U.S. Representative John Carney (D, DE-0) and Tom Tritton, president and CEO of the Chemical Heritage Foundation, both of whom will deliver remarks. The events are also a way for the company to help celebrate the vital role of chemistry in today's society and to observe the International Year of Chemistry.

"There is nothing comparable in status to the Nobel Prize," said Tritton. "It is the highest scientific honor a person can achieve, and made especially prominent when the basic work has so many implications for practical application. This is clearly the case for Dr. Heck's research on palladium-based catalysts for organic reactions."

Helping to host the event, Dr. Ron Staib, technical director, Global Technology, Ashland Hercules Water Technologies, also noted the importance of Dr. Heck's contributions. "Fundamental scientific work like Dr. Heck's is essential to subsequent applications research, leading to practical discoveries having a significant impact, not only within our company, but also worldwide," Staib said.

Heck's initial research connected to his Nobel Prize took place between 1965 and 1971 while he was working in the Central Research division of Hercules and resulted in the publication of groundbreaking Hercules patents such as USP 3705919 titled "Reactions of Organo-metallic compounds of Platinum and Palladium group VIII metals with ethyleneically unsaturated compounds."

Known as the palladium-catalyzed cross-coupling tool, this method has allowed scientists to create complex chemicals by joining carbon atoms together. Carbon atoms meet on a palladium atom to kick-start a chemical reaction. This breakthrough has allowed chemists to create sophisticated carbon-based chemicals as complex as those created by nature. In nature, such chemicals give flowers color, make snake venom poisonous, and create bacteria-killing substances such as penicillin. Today this tool is used worldwide in the commercial production of electronics and pharmaceuticals, to name just a couple of applications.

Dr. Heck was born in Springfield, Mass., on Aug. 15, 1931. He completed both his bachelor's degree and his doctorate at the University of California Los Angeles. He is now retired and living in the Philippines. Heck, along with the other Nobel Laureates, received his award on Dec. 10 in Stockholm, Sweden.

The Nobel Prize in Chemistry is awarded by the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences. Since 1901, only 101 Nobel Prizes in chemistry have been awarded. Each prize consists of a medal, personal diploma and a cash award.

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