People

Kirkham Gold Medal Honors Soil Scientist van Genuchten

The Don and Betty Kirkham Gold Medal will be presented to Dr. Martinus (Rien) T. van Genuchten, retired from the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro, at the 2016 Kirkham Conference at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, 10–14 April in Sede Boqer, Israel. The prestigious award will be presented by Mary Beth Kirkham, daughter of the award’s namesakes, Don and Betty Kirkham.

This is only the second time the Don and Betty Kirkham Gold Medal has been awarded since the award’s inception in 2008. The first Kirkham Gold Medal was awarded in 2008 to Don Nielsen, University of California–Davis, for his extraordinary commitment to science and soil physics and support of soil physicists around the world.

“Dr. van Genuchten’s landmark contributions and leadership in soil physics and vadose zone hydrology serve as the basis for this Gold Medal,” says former SSSA President Jan Hopmans, University of California–Davis, who chairs the selection committee.

“His many achievements have transformed hydrologic science applications by propelling the soil physics and vadose zone hydrology disciplines into the mainstream geosciences field,” Hopmans adds. “Especially important have been his studies of the basic processes and contaminant transport in variably saturated (vadose zone) systems, his contributions in analytical and numerical modeling, his development of powerful (inverse estimation) methods, and his documentation of software that is now being used worldwide in the scientific and engineering communities. Equally important has been his long-time service to the profession.”

Van Genuchten is likely best known for the theoretical equations that he developed for the constitutive relationships among capillary pressure, water content, and the hydraulic conductivity of variably saturated porous media. Because of their attractive mathematical properties and their simplicity, the “van Genuchten equations” are now universally used in numerical simulators of subsurface flow and transport processes. In addition to his research impacts, van Genuchten’s leadership has largely contributed to the successful careers of countless graduate students, junior scientists, and post-doctoral and visiting scientists.

Throughout his career, van Genuchten has given seminars, short-courses, and invited presentations in 30 different countries throughout the world. He was a key contributor to the SSSA launching Vadose Zone Journal, dedicated specifically to his work and budget. He was instrumental in the IPCC launching Vadose Zone Journal, dedicated specifically to his work and budget. He was instrumental in the IPCC launching Vadose Zone Journal, dedicated specifically to his work and budget.

Sivakumar Named Acting Secretary of IPCC

ASA Fellow Dr. Mannava Sivakumar, the former Director of the Climate Prediction and Adaptation Branch in the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) and current Editor-in-Chief of the Weather and Climate Extremes Journal, was appointed as the Acting Secretary of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) in January 2016.

The IPCC was established in 1988 to “assess, on a comprehensive, objective, open, and transparent basis, the scientific, technical, and socioeconomic information relevant to understanding the scientific basis of human-induced climate change, its potential impacts, and options for its mitigation.” As the Acting Secretary, Sivakumar will oversee the IPCC’s work and budget. He brings to his position a scientist with a background in agriculture and the IPCC Secretariat.