In Memory of Prof. Dr. Günther Oehme

Prof. Dr. Günther Oehme, Founding Director (Director until 1998) of the Institute for Organic Catalysis Research at the University of Rostock e. V., Deputy Director of the IfOK from 1998 to 2003

With the passing of Prof. Dr. Günther Oehme on October 5, 2026, at the age of 88, the field of catalysis research in Rostock has lost a figure who played a decisive role in shaping its development over many years. As the long-time director of the Institute for Organic Catalysis Research (IfOK, the Rostock-based predecessor of today's LIKAT), he guided the institute through a period of profound change and laid important foundations for its future development.

The years following German reunification were a time of great uncertainty for non-university research in eastern Germany. Institutes were evaluated, restructured, and many were dissolved. The IfOK, too, faced major challenges. With the dissolution of the Academy of Sciences of the GDR, the institute had to restructure itself institutionally and secure its future under changed political and scientific conditions. During this turbulent period, Günther Oehme was responsible for continuing research and maintaining the institute's location in Rostock. The goal was to preserve what had proven successful, open up new perspectives, and continue scientific work even under difficult conditions.

Anyone looking back at the history of today's LIKAT can see how important this phase was for the institute's future path. The transitional period, which Günther Oehme helped shape, was followed in 1998 by Prof. Dr. Matthias Beller taking over as director of the institute. Following a successful evaluation and admission to the Leibniz Association on January 1, 2003, as well as the merger with the Institute for Applied Chemistry Berlin-Adlershof (ACA) in 2005, the institute evolved into today's Leibniz Institute for Catalysis. The merger of the Rostock and Berlin catalysis research programs brought together diverse scientific expertise under one roof and laid an important foundation for the institute's further development. Without Günther Oehme's contributions, this success story would not have been possible.

Beyond his leadership role, Günther Oehme advanced the field of science. As a chemist, his research focused, among other things, on asymmetric hydrogenation in multiphase systems, micellar reactions, and photocatalysis. In doing so, he laid the groundwork for research that continues to this day around the world. From 1994 to 2003, he also served as a professor of organic chemistry at the University of Rostock. His work was thus closely linked to the scientific training of Rostock students and the academic development of the university.

For his colleagues who witnessed and helped shape those years at the institute, his passing is not merely a reminder of a former director. It is also a reminder of a sensitive person who loved music and literature and who always stood up for others.

Today, researchers from various disciplines at LIKAT are conducting research on new catalytic processes and solutions to key societal challenges. The fact that this work can build upon a scientific tradition that has grown over decades is thanks to many people and generations. Günther Oehme was one of them.

We will honor his memory. Our condolences go out to his family and to all those who were close to him personally.