In Memorium: Bruce Wallace

Bruce Wallace, one of Amgen's first staff members, tragically died in a paragliding accident on September 29, 2002, in the Sierra Nevada Mountains, just eight months after retiring from Amgen. With sparkling eyes and inexhaustible energy, Bruce is remembered for his wit, passion, and loyalty to his friends and colleagues, and his love for his wife and four children.

In 1980, Bruce Wallace was a thirty-two-year-old post-doctoral student in Winston Salser's lab at the University of California, Los Angeles. Salser, Amgen's founding scientist, asked Wallace to find space for a new start-up called Applied Molecular Genetics.

It was important to be close to the University of California campuses at Los Angeles and Santa Barbara as well as the California Institute of Technology for interchange. Yet Bruce thought outside the box and considered Newbury Park. While it wasn't near any university, the homes were affordable.

Wallace also wanted a location away from the smog, with a low cost of living, excellent schools, and room for expansion. That spring, he took out a lease for three thousand square feet of office space in what is now Building 1 on the Amgen campus. There was no furniture when he and the architect began designing the interiors, so they sat on the floor and mapped out offices, a dish room, a cold room, and several lab spaces.

For twenty-two years Wallace worked as Amgen's jack-of-all-trades, in the beginning helping with nuts-and-bolts operations such as recruiting, human resources, facilities, and purchasing. Just before
“Bruce knew our society needed to produce top-quality scientists if Amgen was going to be successful. He felt strongly that science deserved more emphasis in the educational system, so he established a ‘lab kit’ program in cooperation with our scientists and local high schools. He was passionate about doing the right thing.”

— Susan Baros, environmental health and safety, hired in 1992

his retirement, he headed up Amgen’s office of environmental health and safety. He also initiated a local high school education series now named “The Amgen—Bruce Wallace Biotechnology Lab Program.”

“He cared about people, community, education, and learning, and had a profound passion for life,” remembers Scott Trousdale, senior manager of environmental health and safety and a colleague and friend of Wallace’s. “But more than anything else, his wife and family were his prized possessions. All in all, Bruce was just the most wonderful, fun, interesting, and unpretentious person I’ve ever been around.”