

Gulf and Caribbean Research

Volume 29 | Issue 1

2018

John Wesley "Wes" Tunnell, Jr. 1945 - 2018

Larry D. McKinney

Texas A&M University - Corpus Christi

DOI: 10.18785/gcr.2901.07

Follow this and additional works at: <https://aquila.usm.edu/gcr>

Recommended Citation

McKinney, L. D. 2018. John Wesley "Wes" Tunnell, Jr. 1945 - 2018. *Gulf and Caribbean Research* 29 (1). Retrieved from <https://aquila.usm.edu/gcr/vol29/iss1/7>

This Obituary is brought to you for free and open access by The Aquila Digital Community. It has been accepted for inclusion in *Gulf and Caribbean Research* by an authorized editor of The Aquila Digital Community. For more information, please contact Joshua.Cromwell@usm.edu.

OBITUARY



**JOHN WESLEY
("WES") TUNNELL, JR.
1945 - 2018**

John Wesley ("Wes") Tunnell, Jr., 73, passed away on 14 July 2018. Wes was born on 2 May 1945 to John W. Tunnell, M.D. and Rosalie Newman Tunnell, M.D. in Biloxi, MS, while his father, who was from Gregory, TX, was serving in the U.S. Army Air Force at Keesler Field during WW II. Wes was raised in Taft, TX, and received his B.S. (1967) and M.S. (1969) degrees in Biology from Texas A&I University (now Texas A&M University–Kingsville), and his Ph.D. in Biology (1974) from Texas A&M University. He served in the U.S Army for two years (1969–71) at Fort Baker, CA.

Wes married his childhood sweetheart Kathryn (Kathy) Lea Aldridge on 4 June 1966, and they had three children: Stephanie Patterson (Steve) of Forney, TX, Jace Wesley Tunnell (Kathryn) of Corpus Christi, TX, and James William Tunnell (Gerri) of Austin, TX. Wes and Kathy have five grandchildren: Chelsea (Stephanie), Jack and Parker (Jace), and Wesley and William (James). Annual family gatherings each summer and during the holidays were special times for all.

Wes started (1974) and ended (2018) his career at Texas A&M University–Corpus Christi (TAMUCC; formerly Corpus Christi State University), where he was Professor of Biology in the Life Sciences Department and Endowed Chair of Biodiversity and Conservation Science at the Harte Research Institute (HRI) for Gulf of Mexico Studies. Wes started his career as a malacologist under Dr. Harold W. Harry and became the go-to source for western Gulf of Mexico mollusks. Along with a number of colleagues, he put out 2 important publications on Texas seashells; an Encyclopedia and a field guide. Wes was a well-rounded marine ecologist and biologist focusing primarily on coastal and coral reef ecosystems, but like many classical biologists of his era he had broad interests in biodiversity. He did most of his field research in Texas and Mexico, but traveled extensively for engagements and presentations in over 35 countries. He had many Cuban colleagues and traveled often there helping to build science partnerships throughout the Gulf of Mexico.

Wes advised or co-advised 71 M.S. students, 7 Ph.D. students, and 4 post-doctoral research associates. For 32 years, he taught a Coral Reef Ecology class, taking students on 2 week field trips to Veracruz or the Mexican Caribbean as part of an international teaching and research program. This was one of 18 classes he taught over the course of his career. He worked closely with his HRI and international colleagues and other associates from around the Gulf of Mexico, where he actively supported a wide range of environmental initiatives. In 1985 Dr. Tunnell was named the University's first Fulbright Scholar and in 1998 the University's first Texas A&M University System Regent's Professor. In 2007, he was recognized by TAMUCC as an Outstanding Research Scholar, and in 2015 he was named Professor Emeritus. Wes was awarded the Gulf Guardian Award in 2006 for development of Gulfbase and again in 2008 for his book *Coral Reefs of the Southern Gulf*. He was named the Harvey Weil Professional Conservationist of the Year in 2011 and received the Higher Education award for Conservation and Environmental Stewardship from the Coastal Bend Bays Foundation in 2009. Wes was an Emeritus member of both the National and Southern Associations of Marine Labs. He served on the Census for Marine Life U.S. National Committee (2005 - 2010), the Google Ocean Advisory Council, and the Waitt Institute for Discovery Scientific Advisory Committee, to name just a few of his many commitments to advancing marine science. An endowment, the "Dr. Wes Tunnell Gulf of Mexico Fellowship Program," was established in 2016 by the Harte Charitable Foundation to fund graduate student studies of the Gulf of Mexico and to honor Dr. Tunnell's long-time commitment to education and study of the GOM.

Although Wes retired in 2013, he continued on a half time basis at HRI, primarily leading the institute's 2 book series for Texas A&M University Press, and handling HRI's international work and cooperative agreements with Mexico and Cuba. He maintained his research interest in the reefs and banks of the Gulf of Mexico, as well as a Gulf of Mexico Ecosystem Report Card. Some of his last research efforts focused on Biodiversity of the Southern Gulf of Mexico and a look back at the long-term impacts of the Ixtoc I oil spill with the GoMRI C-IMAGE II consortium.

Throughout his career, Wes was committed to publishing his works through journals, articles, and books. He has published over 115 articles, book chapters, and proceedings papers, 76 technical reports, and 7 books. Wes also received 154 research grants and contracts worth more than \$20 million.

Wes Tunnell's official obituaries can be found at <https://www.caller.com/story/news/local/2018/07/14/corpus-christi-marine-biology-professor-wes-tunnell-dead-73/785830002/> and https://www.tamucc.edu/news/2018/07/071618_Dr-Tunnell.html#.W0zCxjaovcs

Larry D. McKinney, *Executive Director, Harte Institute for the Gulf of Mexico*
Texas A&M University – Corpus Christi, Corpus Christi, Texas