John Capinera

John L. Capinera, 75, University of Florida Professor Emeritus, loving husband, father and friend, died in Winter Garden, Florida, on October 30, 2023. Born March 15, 1948, in Bridgeport, CT, he was the son of the late John J. and Muriel S. Capinera.

Raised in Stratford, CT, John attended Honeyspot School, Johnson Junior High School, and Stratford High School. He earned a BS in Biology from Southern Connecticut State University in 1970, and a MS and PhD in Entomology from UMass/Amherst in 1972 and 1976. He served in the US Army Reserve from 1970 to 1976. John's early experiences with summer jobs at the Conn. Experiment Station in New Haven, and mosquito control work in his hometown of Stratford, inspired him to pursue a career in entomology.

John met his future wife Marsha in junior high school in 1960, and they married in 1971. They shared 52 amazing years of marriage together, living in several different locations, and making a wonderful life together full of one adventure after another. John was an avid reader from childhood with an insatiable curiosity for all things in nature. He loved the outdoors and all living things. He enjoyed gardening, bicycling, hiking, and insect collecting. Most of all, he loved his work and his family, and especially his daughter.

John's first position after grad school was Assistant Professor in the Dept of Zoology and Entomology at Colorado State University, Ft. Collins. There, he taught entomology classes, did research in insect pest management and biocontrol, and became a grasshopper expert. He published his first book, Grasshoppers of Colorado. He was instrumental in establishing a separate Dept of Entomology where he was named Acting Dept Chair, followed by Dept Chair. In 1987, he was hired as Professor and Dept Chair in the Dept of Entomology and Nematology, in the Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (IFAS) at the University of Florida, Gainesville. He remained in that position until his retirement in 2015.

John was a prolific writer who authored hundreds of scientific articles and wrote and edited many books including his Handbook of Vegetable Pests and the four-volume Encyclopedia of Entomology. He promoted diversity in the fields of entomology and nematology and mentored many young graduate students as well as new faculty. As department chair at UF, he had vision for the future of the department, promoting new and innovative programs such as distance learning and innovative extension programming to serve the needs of stakeholders in all sub-disciplines of entomology and nematology. He was a tireless advocate for the program and was instrumental in bringing the Department to its #1-in-the-nation status. John's leadership established a department unique on the planet, including faculty from all aspects of the disciplines and the largest graduate and undergraduate programs anywhere.

John's work was also his hobby and, after retirement, he remained active at UF, in teaching, research, and writing. Late in his career, he became the UF/IFAS expert in the management of snails and slugs, continuing research in that field and publishing his findings because there was a need and he had an interest. He also maintained an active role in the Doctor of Plant Medicine program, an innovative non-thesis doctoral program in plant medicine he helped develop with his friend and colleague, the late George Agrios.

John's distinguished career was recognized by many. He was awarded the Distinguished Leadership Award of Merit by Gamma Sigma Delta Honor Society of Agriculture at UF in 1999, became a Fellow and Honorary Member of the Entomological Society of America in 1999, and received a Lifetime Achievement Award from the Florida Entomological Society in 2014.

John will be remembered as a quiet, kind, generous, and thoughtful man, a humble but visionary leader, who loved the work he did, knew how to get things done and made it look easy. He was the personification of Thomas Edison's adage about success being one percent inspiration and 99 percent perspiration. Perseverance was his middle name.