

Alan Schriesheim '54g

Alan Schriesheim recalls with vivid detail what brought him to Penn State for graduate school in 1951: "I was offered a teaching assistantship by the professor in charge of chemistry at the time," he says. "That was a big deal for a kid from New York," says Schriesheim, who was born in the Bronx, the only child of a furniture salesman father and homemaker mother. Fresh off his bachelor's from what was then Brooklyn-Polytechnic University, Schriesheim wasted no time adapting to State College, which he remembers as idyllic. He was also a quick study. By 1954, he had his Ph.D. in chemistry in what he says was "record time" and a job with the National Bureau of Standards in Washington, D.C.



Schriesheim stayed for two years in Washington before decamping for Standard Oil of New Jersey, better known as Esso and then Exxon. There he worked his way through the research lab ranks. He worked on such diverse projects as improving refining processes to major improvements in catalytic combustion that decrease emissions. Schriesheim developed a national reputation—publishing extensively and winning the American Chemical Society's award for research in petroleum chemistry—during his 27 years at Exxon. He was general manager of Exxon Engineering and director of the Corporate Research Lab when another lab called.

The Argonne National Laboratory near Chicago, the first national laboratory established by the Federal Government in 1946, had never recruited its leader from business and industry before. Selecting Schriesheim after a national search proved a good fit: He served as director from 1983 to 1996, the longest tenure of any director. Under his leadership, Argonne's budget increased from \$250 million to nearly \$600 million with 5,000 employees working on multiple research programs. Schriesheim oversaw projects including developing high-temperature superconductors, research on biological microchips, sequencing the human genome, and work on nuclear engineering. He also championed the design and construction of the Advanced Photon Source, a \$456 million accelerator three-quarters of a mile in diameter, which he describes as "the world's most powerful X-ray" with biological and materials science applications.

Schriesheim is a member of the National Academy of Engineering and holds 22 U.S. patents. He was recently appointed as chair of the National Academy Committee on Innovation Models for Aerospace Technologies. In addition to his many professional, business, and philanthropic board memberships, Schriesheim and television science journalist Bill Kurtis established the Chicago Science Explorers program. The program exposes thousands of teachers and students to science and math through study guides for Kurtis' PBS program *The New Explorers*.

Penn State has previously honored Schriesheim as an Alumni Fellow (1984) and with an honorary doctor of science degree (2001). (Schriesheim also holds honorary degrees from the Illinois Institute of Technology and Northern Illinois University.) He is a member of the Department of Astronomy and Astrophysics Board of Visitors and delivered the commencement address for the Eberly College of Science in 1995.

Schriesheim has two grown children and six grandchildren. He was married to the late Beatrice D. Brand for 50 years. He lives in Chicago.

*This career summary is excerpted from the 2005 Distinguished Alumni Awards Ceremony booklet (June 3, 2005, The Pennsylvania State University).