

Joe Breen (1942-1999)

The Heart and Soul of Green Chemistry



Joe Breen was born in Waterbury, Connecticut, on July 22, 1942. He graduated from [Fairfield University](#) in 1964 and received a doctorate in chemistry from [Duke University](#) in 1972. His deep and sincere commitment to public service included serving in the [Marine Corps](#) during the Vietnam War, two years in the [Peace Corps](#), and 20 years at the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

Joe worked as a chemist and manager at the [U.S. EPA](#), demonstrating significant leadership in many major Agency programs. Joe played a major role in creating the [Design for the Environment](#) and [Green Chemistry](#) Programs, both of which call for the creative use of voluntary programs to reduce risk and protect human health and the environment as effective complements to the traditional command and control regulatory program. During his 20-year career at EPA, he was also involved in the Agency's Asbestos in Schools and Public Buildings, National Human Adipose Tissue Survey, Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention Program, and the EPA – Veterans Administration study on toxins in the adipose tissue of Vietnam Veterans.

Following Joe's retirement, he collaborated with colleagues from industry, government, academia, and the national laboratories to found the Green Chemistry Institute as a not-for-profit dedicated to environmentally benign chemical synthesis and processing. The [ACS Green Chemistry Institute](#)[®] (ACS GCI) now operates as a part of the [American Chemical Society](#). ACS GCI promotes green chemistry through information dissemination; research and fellowships; participation in conferences, workshops and symposia; international outreach; industrial partnerships; awards and recognition; and education.

Joe's greatest passion, however, was turning young people on to science, and he spent over 15 years actively promoting science education. He co-founded the Kids in Chemistry and Science-by-Mail programs and edited the high school chemistry text, *Chemistry in the Community*. Joe also served as an adjunct professor, teaching environmental chemistry at Hood College in Frederick, MD, and at Trinity College and American University in Washington, DC.

Joe was always a selfless supporter of his peers, employees, and friends – usually pushing them forward while he operated behind the scenes. He received more satisfaction from seeing others around him succeed than he did from his own personal accomplishments. As a result, Joe has left an international legacy of knowledge and an inspired group of followers who are committed to continuing the work he began. His memory lives on in the green chemistry award bearing his name, the [Joseph Breen Memorial Fellowship](#).