Countdown to Riverside City College's 100th Anniversary

One of the legendary professors to teach at Riverside Junior College was Dr. Edmund C. Jaeger. He taught General Biology (plant and animal), the Natural History of Southern California, General Zoology and Entomology and a course in the comparative anatomy of vertebrates. Jaeger was an instructor at the college from 1922 until his retirement in 1952.

Below are “Tequesquite” yearbook photos of Dr. Jaeger through the years.

The first is a group photo of the 1927 faculty. Dr. Jaeger is in the back row, second from the left.

The three photos below are from 1929, 1932 and 1933.
The next three photos are from 1938, 1939 and 1940.

The last three are from 1941, 1942 and 1951.

The April 11, 1951 edition if the “Tiger Times” student newspaper ran the following article on Dr. Jaeger written by Randolph Barron:

Instructor Is Famed Naturalist

“To look at the slight, mild mannered man in the tweed jacket, soft shirt, and quiet necktie, one would never suspect him of being one of the foremost authorities on the natural history of deserts in America. Yet, if he cared to, Edmund C. Jaeger could claim this distinction with ease. Joined RC Faculty in 1922 Mr. Jaeger has been a member of the RC faculty since 1922. A graduate of Occidental College, Mr. Jaeger has done graduate work at Pomona College, the University of Colorado, and the University of California at Berkeley. His interests lie mainly in the fields of botany, zoology, and the natural history of deserts.

Four New Books in Preparation

A prolific writer, Mr. Jaeger has had eight books published and is now working on four new books. His best known work is ‘Denizens of the Desert.’ Other books by Mr. Jaeger are ‘California Deserts,’ ‘Our Desert Neighbors,’ and ‘Desert Wildflowers.’ In addition to all this he still finds time to be a frequent contributor to such periodicals as ‘Desert Magazine,’ ‘Palm Springs Villager,’ and several scientific journals. Mr. Jaeger’s story of Desert Ironwood appears in the current issue of ‘Pacific Discovery’ which is available in the library.

Takes Weekly Jaunts
It is Mr. Jaeger’s custom to take weekly field trips to distant places with some of his students. While on these trips, they camp in the open and enjoy the outdoor life. One of the most recent was a six day jaunt to Sonora, Mexico, where they visited some of the finest stands of organ pipes and giant cactus in the world.

Avid Note Taker

For all his erudition, Mr. Jaeger has not become a strict disciplinarian. He manages to accomplish a great deal in relative ease, carrying a pencil and note cards at all times. It is Mr. Jaeger’s opinion that all one needs to do to accomplish so much is keep alert and take notes on what he observes. In a year’s time, you will be surprised at what you have.”

The 1952 “Tequesquite” yearbook ran the following tribute to Dr. Jaeger as he completed his final year at the college:

“Occasionally a man emerges whose abilities, whose disposition and whose wisdom set him well apart from the pack. His contributions are most helpful to others. They learn from him, and they do not forget the lessons of friendliness, of integrity and of creative initiative. Edmund C. Jaeger has announced his retirement after 30 years as a member of the college faculty. During this time he has become personally acquainted with no less than 3000 students, many of whom have reached eminence in their fields. For three decades Mr. Jaeger has averaged 40 weekend camping trips each year into the deserts and mountains, almost always with student companions. This is real teaching, friendship, understanding, and patience. From their experiences many student associates have deepened their love for
nature and have gone on to success in fields of natural history. Mr. Jaeger has said:

‘The classroom is only a beginning.’

‘If I had to choose a profession again, I should certainly choose teaching.’

‘No man can be exposed to a sound teaching environment without either direct or indirect benefits.’

‘The present generation is about the same as any generation.’

‘One of the greatest rewards of teaching is to watch young people gain the spark of inspiration.’

Mr. Jaeger will be busier than ever in the years to come. He is now at work on two books; he plans a trip to the Chihuahua Deserts of Central Mexico; he is to become curator of plant science at the Municipal Museum of Riverside, and he will continue lecture engagements. More important than all this, he will maintain countless associations with his former students and colleagues. Mr. Jaeger is retiring, in one sense, but in reality he is just getting a fresh start."

When Dr. Edmund C. Jaeger passed away on August 2, 1983, the tribute below ran in the September 1983 issue of District publication “R.C.C. Reports”.

![Image of Dr. Edmund Jaeger]
“Outstanding teacher, unique, remarkable mind, inspirational, master teacher, kind, charismatic, thoughtful, outstanding human being—these are just a sampling of adjectives used to describe those who knew Dr. Edmund C. Jaeger, professor emeritus of biology at Riverside City College. Jaeger passed away Tuesday, August 2 in the home he had occupied for more than 40 years. He was 96. ‘He was a subdued man,’ said Evan Vail, dean, research and planning. ‘And yet he had good rapport with students and faculty alike. He had an outstanding reputation as a teacher and a writer.’ Jaeger taught biology for thirty years at RCC. When he retired in 1952, he hand-picked his successor, Cecil Johnson, associate professor of biology. ‘He was my hero,’ Johnson said. ‘He inspired me the urge to write and be known. He was a master teacher and had the greatest impact on my life as a scientist than any other person I’ve ever known. He will be the most famous individual this college will ever know.’ Jaeger is credited with the discovery of bird’s hibernation patterns and has authored some 13 books on desert wildlife and Southern California’s natural history. He often took students on overnight trips into the desert to teach them the ways of desert life. ‘I first met Edmund at Occidental College. He was a unique man,’ said professor emeritus Earl McDermont. ‘He had a remarkable mind and was totally involved in his field. He told me he wished he had retired sooner so he could pursue writing and world exploration more avidly,’ McDermont said. Professor emeritus Ralph Bradshaw: ‘I was just starting out my teaching career at RCC and met Dr. Jaeger during a class break. He told me to utilize my time to the fullest and never hesitate to stretch the mind.’ Bradshaw described Jaeger as a believer in excellence and a developer of his abilities. ‘It was a great tribute to him when his former students helped overflow the Tiger’s Den during a special retirement party the college held. Students he guided were coming back to say another goodbye and thank you to the man who encouraged them to ‘stretch their mind.’ It was a tribute to an outstanding teacher...an outstanding human being’.

On May 11, 1991 the “Edmund C. Jaeger Desert Institute” was dedicated on the Moreno Valley College campus. It paid homage to Dr. Jaeger and the environment he loved and nurtured. The photos and article below ran in the November 18, 1999 edition of the “Viewpoints” student newspaper. It was authored by Oralia Romo.

The hills are alive with desert bloom

“Just a few steps behind the Moreno Valley Community College Campus lies the Edmund C. Jaeger Desert Institute. While students take classes and work toward degrees in the buildings below, the desert institute offers a more serene setting. It might be easy to miss the place, since it’s pretty low-key and off the beaten path. But it’s something students should take advantage of if they get the opportunity. The institute, a tribute to Jaeger, a former RCC biology instructor, flourishes with many species of desert plants that are laid out along several trails that wind up and around the hillside. The desert plants are displayed in a
natural environment; some were discovered by Jaeger. Jaeger’s legacy continues to preserve the desert ecosystem. His memory lives on with his guidance that our environment is fragile and needs to be protected. The ‘teacher of teachers,’ as some of his students called him, wanted his pupils to recognize the need to keep an ear tuned to nature’s voice and maintain a clear mind in order to learn from it. Jaeger was an instructor of biology, botany, and zoology for 30 years at Riverside Community College which was known as Riverside City College in those days. His friends described him as a gentle, friendly and humble man. Jaeger was an authority on the Southwest deserts—including the Mojave Desert, the Chuckwalla Mountains, and the mountains of Baja, Calif. He discovered the only bird that hibernates, the Poor-will bird, in the Chuckwalla Mountains of the Colorado Desert of California. Jaeger authored many books, articles, letters, manuscripts and sketchbooks and wrote in a descriptive and colorful but easy-to-read style.”

There are 25 weeks until RCC’s 100th Anniversary on March 13, 2016.

The Riverside City College Instructional Media Center is bringing you this five-year countdown to RCC’s 100th Anniversary. Our intention is to give everyone a weekly glance at the many people and events that have been a part of the college. Our thanks go to the RCC Digital Library Archives and the District’s Office of Strategic Communications and Relations for allowing us to use their photo and newspaper collections. Thanks as well to all of the RCC students and Faculty Advisors that were a part of the yearbook and newspaper staffs. Thanks also to Tom Johnson and Gilbert Jimenez who wrote “the book” about RCC’s history. “Riverside City College 1916-1981- A 65 Year History” is available in the RCC Digital Library. For copyright purposes, all images originating from Riverside City College publications and the District’s Office of Strategic Communications and Relations are the property of the Riverside Community College District.