

## IN MEMORIAM

The National Environmental Health Association (NEHA) was saddened to learn of the deaths of the following individuals. We extend our sympathies to the families, friends, and colleagues of these individuals. Each had a profound impact on our profession and the people around them. All will be greatly missed.



### Celeste Davis

Celeste Davis passed away on April 5, 2023. Davis was a citizen of the Chickasaw Nation. She was born in Alaska and grew up in Oklahoma. She was a Registered Environmental Health Specialist/Registered Sanitarian who earned her

bachelor of science in environmental health science from East Central University. She went on to earn a master of public health in occupational and environmental health from the University of Oklahoma. She was working on her doctor of philosophy in health systems management and policy at the Oregon Health & Science University–Portland State University (OHSU–PSU) School of Public Health.

Davis retired from the U.S. Public Health Service (USPHS) Commissioned Corps after a 20-year service career in February 2017. Her last USPHS assignment was as the director of the Division of Environmental Health Services and the emergency management coordinator for the Indian Health Service, Portland Area. During her career, she served 130 tribal jurisdictions and Alaska Native villages through a variety of environmental public health positions in southeastern U.S., Alaska, New Mexico, and the Pacific Northwest.

After retirement from USPHS, Davis joined the Northwest Portland Area Indian Health Board (NPAIHB) as its environmental public health program director in February 2020. She led the establishment and strategic management of the NPAIHB Environmental Public Health Program. She was instrumental to leading the COVID-19 response as the NPAIHB incident commander in service to Northwest Tribes. Her vision and team received the highest American Indian/Alaska Native Environmental Health Recognition Award in 2022 from NEHA in partnership with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry. Information about the award-winning program can be found at [www.neha.org/ai-an-awards-2022](http://www.neha.org/ai-an-awards-2022).

When Davis started at NPAIHB in 2020, she stated, “I hope my broad work experience in public health—assessment and inspection, environmental and epidemiological investigations, training, policy development, program and project management, and evaluation—will be valuable to the Tribes of the Pacific Northwest.” She was valuable to NPAIHB, the Northwest Tribes, and the Tribal Nations across Indian Country. Her legacy will continue in tribal environmental public health long into the future.

For people who worked with Davis, they will remember her tenacity, kindness, and tireless advocacy for tribal environmental public health programs. She had a passion and skill for mentoring and developing people to their full potential. As was shared by a close friend, “Where you can, Celeste would want us all to do better and be better to each other.”

Two of Davis’s greatest passions were improving public health service delivery and supporting Native American youth. A memorial fund at OHSU has been established in her name to honor her contributions and memory. The fund has been established to support Native American students pursuing graduate degrees in the OHSU–PSU School of Public Health who are enrolled members of a federally recognized tribe.

Contributions in Davis’s memory can be made at <https://give.ohsufoundation.org/?pid=tribute>. Please select “Other Area” from the “Select Gift Designation” drop-down menu, click on “write in your own,” and enter “In Memory of Celeste Davis.”

Source: CDR Matthew R. Ellis, USPHS, Northwest Portland Area Indian Health Board.

### Vartkes “Vic” Karaian

Vartkes “Vic” Karaian passed away on February 23, 2023, at the age of 94. He was born in Watertown, Massachusetts, and was the son of Armenian immigrants. Karaian graduated from Watertown High School in 1947 and continued his education at Tufts University. He graduated in 1951 with a bachelor of science in chemistry and biology. He earned a master of science in sanitary science and public health from the University of Massachusetts in 1953. Prior to attending and graduating from Tufts University with his second master’s degree in civil engineering, he served 2 years in the U.S. Army as a preventative medicine technician during the Korean War.

Karaian was employed by the state of Massachusetts as a registered sanitarian engineer. He worked for the Massachusetts Department of Public Health, followed by the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Quality Engineering, and ended his career with the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection in 1992. He was one of the pioneers in developing safe food handling processes and procedures for Massachusetts. After retirement, he remained active as an environmental public health consultant. He was particularly interested in all matters relative to solid waste management in Massachusetts and the surrounding region.

Throughout his career, Karaian was the recipient of many awards, including Dr. Joseph S. Goldfarb Award in 1979 from the Massachusetts Environmental Health Association (MEHA). The award recognized his exemplary service and achievement in the professional practice of environmental and public health in Massachusetts. He received the Curtis M. Hillard Award in 1992 for outstanding achievement in public health and the Robert C. Perriello Memorial Award in 1993 in the field of environmental health. Vartkes also received the Governor’s Citation in 2008 in recognition of the 37 years he dedicated to the Massachusetts Board of Sanitarians.

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Karaian had strong ties to MEHA and served as president of the association from 1963–1964. In 1997, MEHA created an award in his name to honor his dedication and longstanding service. The award recognizes an individual, organization, or agency for outstanding contributions to and support of the practice of environmental health in Massachusetts. Karaian was the first recipient of the award, which continues to be awarded annually by MEHA.

Source: Vartkes “Vic” Karaian obituary, [www.giragosianfuneral-home.com/obituary/vartkes-vic-karaian](http://www.giragosianfuneral-home.com/obituary/vartkes-vic-karaian)



## Richard K. Rowe

Richard K. Rowe passed away on April 8, 2023. Born on January 11, 1945, in Limestone, Tennessee, he worked on his family’s dairy farm until he earned his undergraduate degree from East Tennessee State University. After graduation, Rowe was

commissioned as an officer in the U.S. Army and served as a ranger with the 82nd Airborne in Vietnam where he earned a Purple Heart. After his military service, he returned to East Tennessee State University and obtained his master’s degree in environmental health.

His career in environmental health started at the South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control. In 1989 he was promoted to the position of environmental health director in Raleigh, North Carolina. He finished his professional career as the director of environmental services for Wake County, North Carolina, where he retired in 2007.

Rowe was an active member of NEHA. He was a lifetime member and joined NEHA in 1972. He went on to be a regional vice-president for 4 years and was elected as a national officer in 1981. He served as the president of NEHA from 1984–1985. Rowe was also the recipient of the Walter S. Mangold Award in 1988, the highest honor bestowed by NEHA.

Rowe was a strong leader. He understood the challenges environmental health professionals faced but did not allow those challenges to deter his work or diminish his passion. Further, he was a strong believer in the collective power of the people within the profession and of NEHA’s potential. This belief was demonstrated in his final President’s Message column in the May/June 1985 issue of the *Journal of Environmental Health*: “I do know we have a lot of problems but I don’t see any of them as insurmountable if we work on them as a group. Attacking separately means we do not have coordination nor do we have direction to our final accomplishments. Environmental health people nationwide will have to band together, synchronize, communicate, and promote as a unified organization. The National Environmental Health Association is the forum in which all of these things can be carried to fruition.”

After retirement, Rowe was active in his community, providing leadership to several different local boards and associations. He was also a faithful member of Washington Street United Methodist Church, serving on numerous committees and cofounding the Active Faith Ministry.

Rowe dedicated his life to service—whether it was farming, protecting the environment, fighting to preserve freedom, enriching the community, or ensuring that each individual be afforded basic human rights.

Source: Richard Keith Rowe obituary, [www.dignitymemorial.com/obituaries/columbia-sc/richard-rowe-11239424](http://www.dignitymemorial.com/obituaries/columbia-sc/richard-rowe-11239424). Photo courtesy of Andre Pierce.



## Janet Williams

Janet Williams passed away on February 21, 2023, at the age of 66. Her career in environmental public health spanned more than 30 years at local, state, and federal levels. She began her career as a field investigator in Kansas City, Missouri, and went on to ascend to a leadership position as the district supervisor. In this position she managed staff who were responsible for enforcing

local regulations. Williams then accepted a supervisory environmental public health specialist position for the state of Missouri and managed staff who were responsible for conducting contract Food and Drug Administration (FDA) inspections, administering comprehensive and statewide environmental activities and programs, and training local regulators within five eastern Missouri counties.

Williams went on to work as the division director for the Environmental Protection Division within the St. Louis County Department of Health. She led a division of five branches with over 125 employees and managed an annual budget of over \$18 million. She managed, organized, planned, directed, and coordinated an array of environmental programs. Williams also provided fiscal stewardship for general revenue funds, permit fees, and contracts and grants for operational programs in air quality, food inspections, milk and dairy, solid waste, recycling, lead, healthy homes, vector control, animal control, and rodent control.

The next step in her career was with FDA. Williams served in various positions within FDA in support of the Office of Training, Education, and Development (OTED) with the Office of Regulatory Affairs (ORA), namely the Division of Programmatic Training. She has served as a training specialist, branch manager, and was promoted to division director in 2020. She had an unwavering dedication to the mission and strategic goals of FDA, a gift for partnering across ORA and FDA, and a keen aptitude for coordinating efforts to provide high-quality learning opportunities to not only FDA staff but also state, local, tribal, and territorial partners.

Williams was a member of NEHA for over two decades and earned her Registered Environmental Health Specialist/Registered Sanitarian

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credential in 2007. She was a graduate of the Environmental Public Health Leadership Institute from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. She was a frequent presenter at numerous conferences, including the NEHA Annual Educational Conference & Exhibition, where she drew in large crowds with her storytelling ability, passion for environmental health, and desire to share her knowledge.

Outside of work, Williams enjoyed spending time with her two daughters, loved to travel, and especially enjoyed cruises. She loved all things cooking, including exploring new recipes, spices, or watching the *Food Network*. She had a passion for mentoring the people around her and imparting her knowledge regardless of if you knew her for 5 seconds or for 5 years. Williams had a great sense of humor, a zest for life, and would always garner a crowd with her storytelling abilities about her real-life experiences.

Words from the in memoriam released by FDA provide a good picture of who Williams was and her impact: “Janet Williams was a force—there were no strangers for Janet. She could spark conversations with anyone and sought to nurture those around her. Above all, Janet was a dear colleague and friend to many. Her

quick wit, intellect, and humor will be missed by all who knew and held her dear.”

A kudoboard ([www.kudoboard.com/boards/V4f4fw9](http://www.kudoboard.com/boards/V4f4fw9)) was created to share thoughts, pictures, and videos in memory of Williams, which will be shared with her family. Memorials can be made in her name to Casey House at the Montgomery Hospice at <https://montgomeryhospice.org/donate-now/>.

Sources: Janet D. Williams obituary, [www.baue.com/obituaries/janet-williams](http://www.baue.com/obituaries/janet-williams); In memoriam and internal announcements, OTED/FDA. ❁

*Editor's Note:* If you would like to share information about the passing of an environmental health professional to be mentioned in a future In Memoriam, please contact Kristen Ruby-Cisneros at [kruby@neha.org](mailto:kruby@neha.org). The *Journal* will publish the In Memoriam section twice a year in the June and December issues, or in other issues as determined appropriate.

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[neha.org/membership](http://neha.org/membership)

