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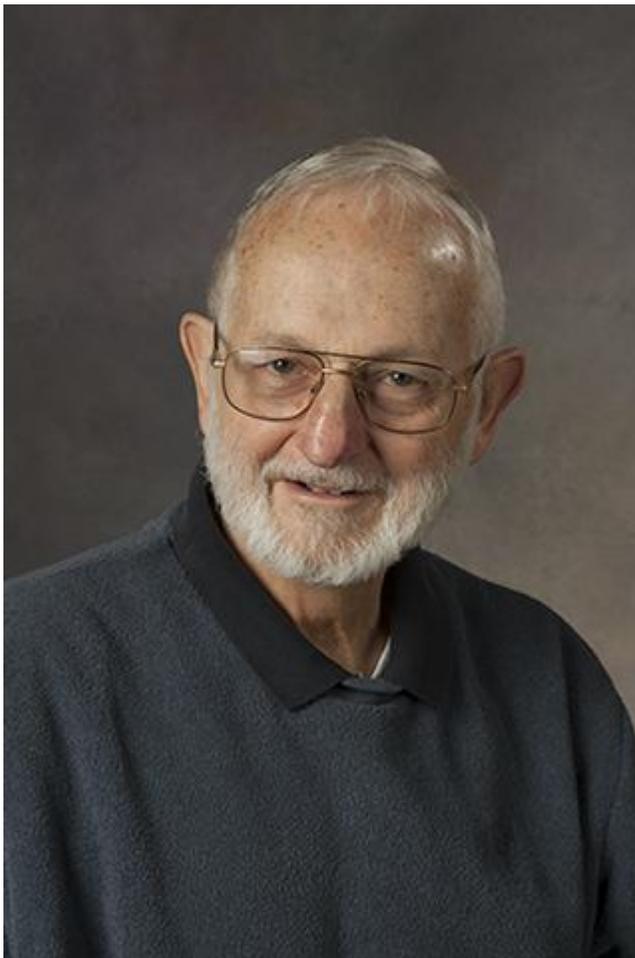
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## Former NCI Scientist Leaps into 80th Year of Adventurous Life

*By Samuel Lopez, Staff Writer; portrait from SPGM archives; contributed images*

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*Dolph Hatfield, Ph.D.*



Dolph Hatfield, Ph.D., doesn't let much slow him down. Outside the lab, the newly minted octogenarian, a scientist emeritus in NCI's Center for Cancer Research, has spent much of his life traveling the world and completing exploits of athletic endurance. So it's only fitting that he would celebrate his latest birthday by bungee jumping off the Macau Tower in China.

It was no small leap, though—Macau Tower is the world's tallest bungee jump. Hatfield was conveyed to the structure's upper deck, a staggering 764 feet above the ground. There, he donned the necessary gear, shuffled onto a narrow platform overlooking the city and harbor, and leaped into a **roughly 670-foot plunge** before his bungee cord sprung and broke his fall.

While many people would be petrified at the thought of such a feat, Hatfield wasn't concerned. He said, "I stepped to the edge of the 764-foot ledge, looked down at what I was about to do, and said to myself, 'let's get it on!'"

Hatfield felt drawn to the daring form of celebration because he wanted to do something challenging that proved "80-year-olds still have what it takes to just do it."

That thirst for challenge has driven much of Hatfield's adventurous life. In addition to his successful scientific career and contributions to nearly 300 scientific publications, he holds 71 medals from the Senior Olympics, as well as a black belt in Tae Kwon Do. His adventures have included spelunking at sites across the globe; multiple mountain-climbing trips, including three ascents of Mount Kilimanjaro; skydiving; Formula 2000 auto racing; off-road racing in the Baja 500 and Baja 1000; running with the bulls in Pamplona, Spain; and **numerous other activities**.

His favorite trip, though, was rappelling down and subsequently reascending El Capitan, Yosemite National Park's famous mountain, on a single rope that was over 2,600 feet long. The reascend took over eight hours, but Hatfield deeply enjoyed this endeavor. Adding to the fun, it set the world record for the longest distance rappelled on a single rope.

The most difficult challenge in Hatfield's life, however, was his battle with paralysis after suffering a ruptured spinal disk during surgery to repair a broken arm. Despite the corrective follow-up surgery, his doctors told him he would probably never walk again. After hours of personal effort, one week of intensive care, and nearly four weeks of physical rehabilitation, Hatfield regained much of his mobility.

Four months later, he went back to adventuring—he, his daughter, and his NCI colleague Brad Carlson rappelled down a 345-foot skyscraper in Des Moines to raise funds for the Special Olympics.

"During this period, my wife and doctors never heard me complain about my condition," Hatfield said, "nor was I afraid or concerned in the least."

Before retiring from NCI as a scientist emeritus in 2014, Hatfield served as chief of the Section on the Molecular Biology of Selenium, Mouse Cancer Genetics Program, Center for Cancer Research. Much of his work focused on the element selenium, an essential component in the diet of mammals, including humans.

He believes one of his greatest career accomplishments was “developing several novel ... models that confirmed at the molecular level [many] of the purported claims of the [numerous] health benefits attributed to selenium.” Those benefits include lowering the risk of certain cancers, delaying HIV’s progression to AIDS, and protecting against muscular and cardiac disease.

Hatfield’s work to help others also factors heavily into his personal life. During the 1960s, he participated in civil rights campaigns in Montgomery County, Maryland. Since then, he has published 13 essays and letters related to civil rights and social justice. In addition, he has served underprivileged members of his community by befriending several homeless men and helping them to find jobs and homes.

“I’m extremely proud of each of these gentlemen’s achievements and of being part of their lives,” Hatfield said.

Because of his selflessness and adventurousness, Hatfield’s family, peers, and acquaintances often say they are delighted to be a part of his life, and they hope he has many more intrepid birthdays to come.



*Hatfield and daughter Sandy (background, left) on their Des Moines skyscraper rappel. (Image contributed by Dolph Hatfield.)*



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