

## The 1994 Preston E. James Eminent Latin Americanist Career Award



Joshua C. Dickinson III

The Conference of Latin Americanist Geographers honors **Joshua C. Dickinson III** with the Preston E. James Eminent Latin Americanist Career Award. Through his versatile work as an environmental geographer in Latin America and elsewhere, Dr. Dickinson ---or simply Josh--- has demonstrated the central role that geographers can and should play in the search for and design of sustainable development. His holistic concern with society and environment in Latin America follows the example of Preston E. James.

According to his father, Dr. J. C. Dickinson, Jr., Josh's beginnings as an environmentalist and as a "gringo de corazón latino" date back to 1945, when he was eight years old. World War II was raging and his father was at sea. Josh and his mother went to Zamorano, Honduras, for an extended visit with the University of Florida biologist Archie Carr who was teaching at the Escuela Agricola Panamericana. In 1948 he returned to bounce over the back roads of Honduras with his ornithologist father and the Carrs, collecting, absorbing backwoods lore, and eating tortillas.

These early experiences influenced his choice of Spanish during his midshipman years and the Mediterranean fleet for his active duty with the Navy. His bride Sally met his ship in the ports of Spain and Portugal. In 1963 Josh formally embraced geography under the guidance of Raymond Crist at the University of Florida. Graduate research carried him to Mexico, Peru and Brazil following the recurrent theme of people and their use of natural resources.

An interdisciplinary approach, which incorporated tropical agriculture and ecology, and a desire to combine theory with practice characterized Josh's work as assistant professor of geography at the University of Florida from 1967 to 1972. It led to a post-doctoral fellowship in systems ecology combined with environmental consulting under Eugene Odum at the University of Georgia, and to Josh's conversion from disciplinary academic to interdisciplinary environmental consultant.

Josh's career as environmental consultant now spans more than two decades and has yet to reach its peak. It has evolved from the status of employee, to independent consultant, to co-ownership with his wife Sally of *Tropical Research and Development, Inc.*, a company with offices in Gainesville Florida and Washington, D. C.,

employing more than 30 permanent staff and numerous contract personnel worldwide in projects financed mainly by USAID, BID, UNDP, and OAS. In 1992 he furthermore created a not-for-profit foundation, the *Tropical Forest Management Trust*, to advance his foremost lifelong goal, the sustainable management and conservation of tropical forests. Geographically Josh's work has broadened from Florida and Central America, to South America and the Caribbean and, since the late 1980s, to Africa and Asia. The success of Josh's career is based on the simple premise that beside having a sub-disciplinary specialty, the geographer has-or should have-the holistic perspective which permits identification and drawing together of the range of disciplinary competencies required to address complex society-environment problems.

The versatility and range of Josh's consultancy work is astounding. Without considering the full variety of work undertaken by *Tropical Research and Development*, he has been personally involved in the study, design, and promotion of sustainable yield natural forest management in Ecuador, Colombia, **[end p. 152]** Mexico, Panama, Peru, and Bolivia. He has played a major role in watershed management and development projects in Venezuela, Ecuador, Surinam, and Guatemala. He has contributed to agricultural development and conservation design and evaluation in several Latin American countries; to analyses of urban infrastructure and environment in Mexico City, Buenos Aires, and the Philippines and in cities of arid lands; to the assessment of resource development in mangrove areas of Ecuador, Honduras, and the Caribbean. Institution-building for tourism development in St. Kitts, marine-park development in Belize, resource conservation evaluation in Nepal, and an environmental audit of Zambia's privatization program are further illustrations of Josh's willingness to face eclectic challenges.

Based upon this broad empirical experience, Josh has increasingly played a leadership role in resource management workshops, and sustainable development networking and policy advice at the international level. Particularly important are his senior advisor role in the UNDP strategy for worldwide sustainable development networks, and his role as environmental advisor for the US AID-funded Asia Environmental Partnership.

While most of Josh's written work is in the form of reports, he has published more than a dozen empirical and conceptual articles. Among the latter, "Alternatives to monoculture in the humid tropics of Latin America" (1972); "Una perspectiva ecológica sobre el desarrollo" (1981); "Environmental profiles in development strategies" (1984); "Settlement in the humid tropical lifezones of Latin America" (1986); and "Settlement and development in the moist and wet tropics" (in press) illustrate his long-standing innovative thinking about issues of sustainable development.

While roaming the world on assignments, Josh--with Sally, his alter ego--has been a fixture in CLAG (where he served as President from 1986-88) and in the Latin Americanist circle of the AAG. In these contexts he has been a constant symbol of the importance of applied geography. He has furthermore served as a reminder that doing useful work in Latin Americanist geography is not only a matter of intellectual rigor, but also a matter of heart, of empathy, of poetry, and of great fun.

**Rolf Wesche**[end p. 153]