

Awards and Citations

Presentation of the 2022 Strimple Award to Joseph Konecki

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It is an honor to present to you, Joseph Konecki, recipient of the 2022 Strimple Award.

Joe was born in Bad Axe, Michigan. Perhaps more consistent with the eighteenth century, Joe's passion for science was sparked by mentors of a religious bent—a nun who sent him on a field trip to the classic Middle Devonian rocks of Arkona, and another who sparked his interest in chemistry.

Joe acquired a bachelor's degree in chemistry at Wayne State University in Detroit. He had a successful career as a specialist in the printing industry, specifically newspaper ink. If you've ever picked up a newspaper and got ink on your fingers, it wasn't ink formulated by Joe.

Despite pursuing chemistry as a career, his interest in fossils continued to intensify. This passion was fueled in part by his proximity to two world class faunas: the Arkona and Silica shales.

During one trip to Arkona, Joe met a founding member of the Friends of the University of Michigan Museum of Paleontology. She invited him to a meeting in Ann Arbor—an invitation he gladly accepted. There Joe met many like-minded souls, in addition to career paleontologists, such as Robert Kesling, Erwin Stumm, Aurèle La Rocque, and Ruth Chilman. With new fossil friends, he began to pursue fossils farther afield, collecting the Burlington Limestone of Missouri, the Bangor Limestone of Alabama, and the Wheeler and Pioche Shales in Utah and Nevada, among many places in between.

Shortly after arriving in Ann Arbor as a doctoral candidate, I met Joe at a meeting of the Friends of the University of Michigan Museum of Paleontology. By that time, Joe was—as he remains today—a pillar of that organization. He has served the group as president, secretary, and currently as treasurer—a capacity in which he has labored for over twenty years.

During that first “Friends” meeting, we discovered a shared passion for fossil crinoids. Like Joe, I had aggressively pursued crinoids since my youth. Joe graciously invited me to join him among the famous fossiliferous rocks of the region. We explored many classic localities in Michigan and Ontario, and Joe helped collect important data from the Middle Devonian Bell Shale for a chapter of my dissertation. However, most of our time together was spent collecting the Late Ordovician Bobcaygeon Formation of Ontario.

Most Saturdays for three consecutive summers, Joe picked me up around 3 am to drive north of Toronto to collect fossils,

mostly echinoderms, in the quarries around Lake Simcoe. We regularly stayed past sunset, labelling and wrapping our final specimens before carting the material back to the truck for the return trip to Ann Arbor. Following 24 hours of concerted effort, he'd drop me off on Sunday morning. Together we collected many hundreds of exquisite echinoderms. Those Saturdays with Joe were among the fondest of my “Michigan years.” In addition to collecting together in Michigan and Ontario, Joe and I have pursued crinoids across Alabama, Arkansas, Idaho, Kentucky, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Montana, Missouri, New Mexico, Nevada, and Utah. We've spent countless hours over the past two decades in unity of purpose.

In many respects, Joe is unsurpassed in the field. He is a tireless scientific collector with an exquisitely trained eye. After over five decades of amassing specimens, his collection is world class, but before addressing that, I must say more of his skill in the field. He is a selfless collector, always putting the specimens first. Even when “competing” with others who have permission to search the same quarries, Joe would drop everything to help a less-experienced individual collect a delicate specimen. He consistently prioritizes saving important fossils above all else.

Joe is also an exceptional fossil preparator and has set up a professional lab in his home. In addition, he has helped many others establish high-quality fossil preparation facilities. With his background in chemistry, he is full of wisdom regarding non-traditional materials that may facilitate the extraction of fossils. Just a few months ago, I contacted him about the best way to remove a thick matte finish that was added to two critical specimens.

Following preparation, most of Joe's specimens end up in his ever-growing museum-like basement. One of his motivations for recently moving into a new home was to have more room for fossils. Most of the specimens are stored in self-built custom sample cabinets. While in Michigan, Joe helped me create a pair of beautiful study cabinets that I still use. He continues to add more cabinets as his collection grows, including extensive storage for unprepared material. His specimens are thoroughly documented in a database of his own design. In addition to being readily available to researchers, he shares them with the public through his personal website (<http://www.crinus.info>).

Given the widespread knowledge of his substantial collections of fossils from Ontario, when the Royal Ontario Museum began to develop an exhibit to showcase the rich record of Paleozoic marine invertebrates from that province, Jean-Bernard Caron reached out to Joe, specifically asking for help in acquiring exhibit-quality specimens from Arkona and Brechin. Not only did Joe oblige, but he also went out of his way to purchase

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specimens specifically for the ROM exhibits. During the grand opening of “Dawn of Life,” the ROM draped the entryway with banners featuring specimens that Joe donated to the museum. Likewise, when the University of Michigan recently renovated their exhibits, Joe provided them with some of the best specimens in his collection, filling in gaps for the enjoyment of the public.

As if all this weren’t enough to merit the Strimple Award, Dan Fisher specifically requested I mention Joe’s assistance

with the Hyde Park mastodon. Dan had an immediate need to process this significant discovery in a short amount of time. Joe gladly set aside all else to dedicate nearly six months to molding and casting the mastodon in Dan’s lab.

I consider Joe a mentor, colleague, and a superb avocational paleontologist, but most of all, I consider Joe a dear friend. Please join me in honoring Joe Koniecki with a well-deserved round of applause for his contributions to paleontology.