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Paul Elliott, retired FSU professor and founding member of Miccosukee Land Co-op, dies

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There might not be a medical school at Florida State University if not for Paul Elliott, who in 1971 founded the Program in Medical Sciences at FSU.

PIMS, a University of Florida program in which 30 students received their first year of medical education at FSU, was imbued with a mission Elliott believed in deeply: to reach out to the rural and under-served areas of the Panhandle and the state, a charge FSU's College of Medicine was founded with in 2000.

"Paul laid the groundwork for us," said FSU's Myra Hurt, acting dean at the creation of the medical school and the last director of PIMS. "We owe a great deal to him."

Elliott died Saturday of heart failure at Tallahassee Memorial Hospital. He was 76.

PIMS was by no means the only significant venture the native of Pueblo, Colorado helped launch in Tallahassee.

Elliott was a founding member of the Miccosukee Land Co-op, a community of about 100 homes in eastern Leon County. His was the first house to be built at the co-op, and Elliott and his daughters Alison and Susan actively helped Mad Dog Construction's Chuck Mitchell with the physical labor.

Elliott was Mitchell's first teacher at FSU, and the two became lifelong friends.

"Paul was a mentor to so many of here as we struggled to find out what we wanted to do with our lives," Mitchell said. "He was the go-to-guy for so many students at FSU."

A master gardener and an accomplished cook, Elliott was a colorful figure on FSU's campus. Provost Larry Abele was chairman of the biology department in 1977 when Elliott stepped down from PIMS and requested to be an undergraduate advisor. Abele fondly remembered Elliott coming to work shirtless on a motorcycle.

"When you think how loose the world was here in the 1970s, as that changed Paul never really changed," Abele said.

Said Mitchell: "He was one of our leaders and one of the oldest hippies we had left in Tallahassee. I think if Paul could have he would have still been wearing a ponytail, if he had any hair left."

Robert Reeves, a retired biology professor who succeeded Elliott as PIMS director, described his former colleague as a "maverick."

"Paul was strong-willed and worked well with students," Reeves said. "He had a lifestyle that was little different from most of us married faculty members."

Elliott retired in 2000 and assumed professor emeritus status as he continued to teach courses. He

received a host of teaching honors and awards, including “Top Ten University Faculty” award from 1989-95.

In the mid-1980s, he integrated popular news and current culture into introductory biology courses and gave one of the first seminars in the country on HIV/AIDS, Abele said.

“Paul was always there for students,” Abele said. “He would encourage them to get connected with faculty to do research projects.”
