

It's Nice that People Remember Your 168th Birthday!?!?!



With renovation everywhere else in the chemistry complex, faculty and students used the atrium of Lamont DuPont Laboratory to celebrate the birthday of J. Willard Gibbs.

event put on by physical chemistry faculty and students to highlight the contributions of the 19th-century scientist and scholar attracted approximately 100 persons to partake of cake, reminisce about physical chemistry, and remind them of the “joy” of learning the theories that Gibbs developed. The party has been an annual event in Chemistry and Biochemistry since 1989, the sesquicentennial of Gibbs’ birth.

Gibbs, generally working at Yale in isolation from other scientists, developed much of the mathematical apparatus underlying the sciences of

We all hope that we’ll be remembered fondly by those who follow us, but Josiah Willard Gibbs would be absolutely delighted to know that the Department of Chemistry and Biochemistry remembered him with a 168th birthday party (which would have been February 11, 2007) on February 9. (Okay, so we were a few days early, but what’re a few days out of 168 years?)

Blue and gold streamers (for Delaware) and blue and white balloons (Gibbs was associated with Yale throughout his career.) created a festive atmosphere in the atrium. The annual



Students of physical chemistry take a break from learning Gibbs equations to sample the cake.



Professors Neal and Polenova take a break from their busy schedules to recognize J. Willard, as well.

thermodynamics and statistical mechanics, making him a true American genius. Much of his work was published in obscure journals. It was said that, at the time he was developing his formalism, fewer than ten people in the world could understand the subtlety of his work. Nowadays, the developments Gibbs made are staples of courses in physical chemistry, physics, and engineering. As Joseph Noggle, former professor of physical chemistry at the University of Delaware, says in his classic textbook, “No class in physical chemistry should let his birthday (February 11) pass without paying homage to him as the father of us all.”