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# Robert Webster, TAMUG sargassum guru, dies at 59

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Posted: Friday, September 4, 2015 12:15 am

By JOHN WAYNE FERGUSON



Courtesy Texas A&M-Galveston

## Robert Webster

Robert Webster



where they might land

The seaweed was Webster's muse, according to Tom Linton, an assistant professor of marine resource management at Texas A&M, who created the Sargassum Early Advisory System along with Webster.

"He solved this riddle about sargassum and when it's coming," Linton said. "People have been working on that since the days of Benjamin Franklin. What he did was no small accomplishment."

Webster died Thursday. He was 59.

The Great Seaweed Landing of 2014 gave a degree of notoriety to Webster. The early advisory system he devised at Texas A&M has evolved into an automated computer application and has drawn the interests of tourism communities around the Gulf of Mexico.

Linton said Webster was well-loved by the students at the Pelican Island campus.

GALVESTON — When Galveston's beaches were swamped with seaweed last summer, most of the island saw a smelly, ugly problem.

Robert Webster saw an opportunity.

Webster, a researcher at Texas A&M at Galveston, wanted to know all he could about the sargassum seaweed landing in Galveston. How fast did the algae grow? Where was it coming from? What was the chemical composition of the water in the days and hours before more came ashore?

Webster, and his team of Texas A&M at Galveston students could often be found out on the beaches in the morning, sticking gauges and measuring sticks into the new seaweed landings. Other times they would be in the bowels of the school's academic building poring over satellite imagery and weather data to identify new mats of seaweed and predict

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"He was a fantastic manager," Linton said. "He assembled a great team of students and they rightfully admired him. He was just a born leader."

Webster was a long-serving volunteer on the Park Board of Trustee's Beach Maintenance Advisory Committee, where he helped develop practical standards for the city and Park Board to use while cleaning and preserving the island's beaches, said Park Board executive director Kelly de Schaun.

"His approach, while scientific and with the research to underscore it, was very applicable in the field," de Schaun said. "Because of that keen understanding, he was really influential in guiding the way we treat our beaches."

During his battle with colon cancer, Webster zealously worked to support others who suffered from the same affliction, helping to organize a gastrointestinal cancer support group at the University of Texas Medical Branch.

"It's my philosophy and belief that when and if it finally takes me down, when it's over with, the cancer's going to walk away and say, 'That was one tough fight,'" Webster said in 2012.

Contact reporter John Wayne Ferguson at 409-683-5226 or [john.ferguson@galvnews.com](mailto:john.ferguson@galvnews.com). Follow him on Twitter, @johnwferguson.

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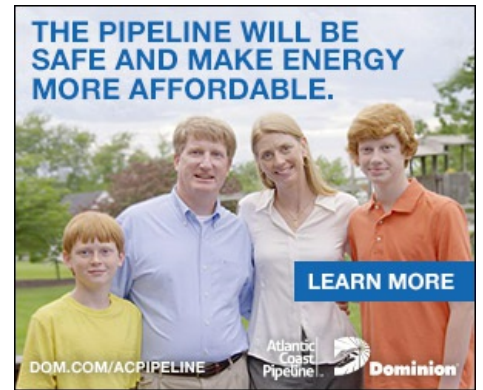
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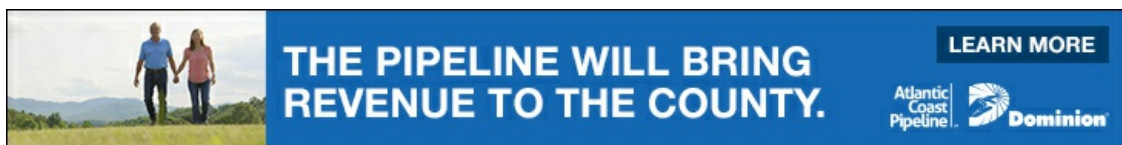
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