



LEONAS TO RECEIVE OLNEY MEDAL

Karen K. Leonas is the 2025 recipient of the **AATCC Olney Medal**. Leonas, Professor in the Department of Textile and Apparel, Technology and Management at North Carolina State University, is being recognized for her prolific contributions to textile sciences. Leonas has primarily worked in academia, with a focus on sustainable processes and practices throughout the supply chain including textile processing, recycling, examination of closed-looped manufacturing, circular economy processes, life-cycle analysis, and social justice; weathering and degradation of polymeric materials; protective apparel material design and development specifically for resistance to small particle and liquid penetration; and surface and chemical modifications of textiles and polymeric materials. She has spent many years instructing and influencing future textile professionals for the industry.

The results of Leonas' research projects are found in peer reviewed publications, books, journal articles, as well as presentations and student advisement. She has received several awards in her career, from various universities and the Association of Nonwoven Fabrics Industry (INDA).

CAREER

Leonas earned a BS in Textile Chemistry from North Carolina State University (NCSU) in Raleigh, NC, USA in 1980. Soon after receiving her degree, Leonas began working at Burlington Industries as a Textile Technologist and then Director of the Aerospace Program. After a few years in the industry, Leonas received her MS in Clothing and Textiles in 1983 and then her PhD in Textile Chemistry/Textile Physics in 1985 from the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. In 1986, Leonas began her career in academia at the University of Illinois as an assistant professor in the Department of Textile, Apparel, and Interior Design. In 1990, Leonas joined the University of Georgia (UGA) as an assistant professor in the Department of Textiles, Merchandising, and Interiors, and worked as an assistant professor for three years. In 1993, Leonas became an associate professor in the same department for seven years. After becoming an associate professor, she became a professor in the Department of Textiles, Merchandising, and Interiors, and also became an affiliate professor in the College of Agriculture Engineering. In the last two of her seventeen years at UGA, Leonas was also a graduate programs coordinator. In 2007, Leonas moved to Washington State University (WSU) and became the Department Head and professor of the Department of Apparel, Merchandising, Design and Textiles. For three of her six years at WSU, Leonas was a

graduate programs coordinator. In 2013, Leonas returned to her alma mater as the Department Head and professor in the Department of Textile and Apparel, Technology and Management. Leonas was department head for two years and continues today as a professor at NCSU.

ACHIEVEMENTS AND AWARDS

Education Awards

At the University of Illinois, Leonas received seven awards, three of which were the Outstanding Advisor Award for the Textiles and Apparel Group. At the University of Georgia, Leonas received the Textiles, Merchandising and Interiors Outstanding Teacher Award in 2000 and in 2004; the Textiles, Merchandising and Interiors Outstanding Advisor Award in 2000, 2002, and 2003; as well as the Outstanding Advisor/Mentor Award for 2001-2002. Leonas also received the National Outstanding Faculty Advisor Award from the National Academic Advising Association (NACADA) in 2002. In 2003, she received the Outstanding Advisor of the Year Award from the College of Family and Consumer Sciences from UGA. In 2005, Leonas was inducted into the Teaching Academy at UGA. In 2006, Leonas received the Creswell Award for Leadership in Motivating and Guiding Students from the College of Family and Consumer Sciences. At North Carolina State University, Leonas received the Outstanding Extension and Service Award in 2018, and received the Faculty Recipient Sustainability Award in 2023.

Research Awards

In 1989, Leonas received the American Home Economics Association Research Award, and in 1990, received the American Home Economics Association New Achiever Award. In 1999, Leonas received the Best Paper Award from the Association of the Nonwoven Fabrics Industry (INDA) and received the Best Section Paper Award from INDA in 2004. Leonas has also received honoraria from Gamma Sigma Delta (The Honor Society of Agriculture), and Omicron Nu (The Honor Society of Home Economics). Throughout her academic and professional career, Leonas has received over forty research support grants, including funds from the Walmart Foundation and Cotton Incorporated.

Other Achievements

Leonas has written 60 refereed journal articles and has four refereed journal articles in preparation. She has 62 refereed published proceedings and abstracts with presentations/posters, edited two books, wrote several book chapters, peer reviewed multiple journals and books, and has had numerous interviews, including with *NBC News* and the *Washington Post*. She was the Guest Editor for the Sustainability 2020 Special Issue of *AATCC Journal of Research*. Leonas has presented her research at a multitude of events and conferences, including the

AATCC Circularity Conference and TechTextil, and has been a primary research advisor for twenty-four graduate students and nineteen undergraduate students. Leonas is dedicated to the textile industry, as well as her family.

Leonas has been married to her husband, Michael Leonas, for 44 years, and together they have two children, Megan Andrizzi and Robert Leonas, as well as two grandchildren. Leonas stated that her family have been her biggest supporters throughout her career and she would not have been able to do it without the encouragement from her husband. Leonas is also grateful to her parents, and for their support in fostering a passion for science and exploration from a young age. Additionally, she draws inspiration from her students and her colleagues, as they empower her to create a sustainable world.

AATCC INVOLVEMENT

Leonas has been a member of AATCC since 1978. As an active member, Leonas has been a part of several committees, such as RA100 Global Sustainability Test Methods, and the editorial board of the *AATCC Journal of Research*. Leonas also served as the AATCC Student Chapter Advisor at Washington University from 2008 to 2013, and currently serves as the AATCC Student Chapter Advisor at North Carolina State University. She has presented at several AATCC conferences and workshops, and was a session moderator at the AATCC International Conference in 2004. Locally, Leonas is an active member of the Piedmont Section.

The Olney Medal

Established in 1944 in honor of Louis Atwell Olney, the founder and first president of AATCC, the Olney Medal recognizes outstanding achievement in textile or polymer chemistry or other fields of chemistry of major importance to textile science. The award consists of a gold medal, a scroll, and an honorarium.

Presentation of the medal each year is a highlight of AATCC's annual conference. This year, the conference, Fabricating the Future: AATCC and SEAMS Annual Conference, will be held October 5-7, 2025, at The Westin Savannah Harbor Golf Resort & Spa in Savannah, Georgia, USA. The Association will present the Olney Medal at the Awards Presentation on October 6, 2025.

Leonas will deliver the traditional Olney Medal Address on October 6, following the Awards Presentation at 4:15 pm. The title of her talk is "Textile Chemistry: What a Wonderful World."

For information about the Olney Award, and a list of past Olney Medal recipients., visit www.aatcc.org/olney.