



Ruth Rogan Benerito

January 12, 1916 - October 5, 2013

Metairie, Louisiana

Ruth Rogan Benerito, the New Orleans chemist whose work helped free American households from the ironing board, died at her home in Metairie, Louisiana, on October 5, 2013. She was ninety-seven.

She was born in New Orleans on January 12, 1916, and finished high school at fourteen. She entered Sophie Newcomb College, Tulane University's college for women, at fifteen and earned her chemistry degree in 1935, in the depths of the Depression, when few employers wanted a woman chemist. She taught high school science, studied at Bryn Mawr, earned a master's degree from Tulane and, in 1948, a doctorate in physical chemistry from the University of Chicago.

In 1953 she joined the United States Department of Agriculture's Southern Regional Research Center in New Orleans. Cotton was losing ground to new synthetic fabrics that came out of the dryer smooth. Benerito and her colleagues studied how the long cellulose chains in cotton fiber could be chemically linked to one another, so the fabric would spring back instead of creasing. Her improvements to that cross-linking chemistry helped make wash-and-wear and permanent-press cotton practical and affordable, and helped keep the American cotton industry competitive.

That was not her only contribution. During the Korean War era she worked on fat emulsions that could be given intravenously to seriously ill patients who could not eat, an advance in feeding the wounded and the sick. Over her career she was named on more than fifty patents.

She led research groups at the center for years and taught at Tulane and later at the University of New Orleans,

continuing to teach long after she formally retired from government service in 1986. In 2002, at eighty-six, she received the Lemelson-MIT Lifetime Achievement Award. She often reminded audiences that she had worked with a team and did not invent wrinkle-free cotton alone.

Notice Nearby remembers the Newcomb girl who changed what millions of Americans pulled from the dryer every day.

Services

Died at her home in Metairie, Louisiana, October 5, 2013. Physical chemist with the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Southern Regional Research Center; key developer of wrinkle-resistant wash-and-wear cotton. Lemelson-MIT Lifetime Achievement Award, 2002. Portrait: USDA photograph (public domain), hosted by Notice Nearby.

NN-OBIT-2026-H234

<https://noticenearby.com/obituaries/ruth-benerito-obituary-metairie-la>

Base stores the content hash, publication number, memorial id, and timestamp - not the full obituary text. The complete memorial remains on Notice Nearby. This is not a legal affidavit.

This page is a memorial, not a legal affidavit.