

Surprised chemistry Nobel Prize winner says lab days over

October 7 2010

American Richard Heck, [who shared this year's Nobel Prize for chemistry](#) with two Japanese scientists, said Thursday he was surprised at the honour for his groundbreaking work.

The 79-year-old pensioner, who now lives in the Philippine capital Manila, said his days in the laboratory were long over and he now intends to pursue low-key retirement in his adopted country.

"No, I didn't expect to win. It was a total surprise. My objective was to do something useful for chemistry," he told AFP at a rented bungalow he shares with his Filipina wife.

"I didn't start a research hoping to get a prize, but I am very happy that my work became very useful."

He said he did not know what to do with the prize money, except to save it and spend it on something "useful" in the future.

"I am of retirement age, I wouldn't get a job if I wanted to teach. I am satisfied with my life as it is," he said.

"And I am no longer in a position to do laboratory work."

The Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences said Heck and Japanese scientists Ei-ichi Negishi and Akira Suzuki separately made outstanding contributions in organic [chemistry](#), a field whose basis is carbon, one of

the essential elements of life and also of many industrial synthetics.

Through the trio's work, [organic chemistry](#) has developed into "an art form, where scientists produce marvellous chemical creations in their test tubes," the award citation said.

Heck laid the groundwork for coupling between [carbon atoms](#) by using a catalyser, or chemical to promote the process, in the 1960s.

Negishi fine-tuned it in 1977 using a field of compounds known as organohalides, and taken a step further by Suzuki, who found a practical way to carry out the process using so-called organoborons.

Heck, Negishi and Suzuki will share 10 million Swedish kronor (1.49 million dollars) and each receive a medal.

Heck on Thursday said the prize was not enough to change his modest lifestyle, although he said there was a possibility he may buy a house.

He said he has been living in the Philippines on-and-off since retiring in 1989 from the University of Delaware in the United States.

He has rented the Manila bungalow for three years, and there are no plans to go back to his home country anytime soon.

However, plans were being made for him to travel to Europe to receive his Nobel medal, an occasion which he said he would also use to deliver lectures there and meet his peers.

(c) 2010 AFP

Citation: Surprised chemistry Nobel Prize winner says lab days over (2010, October 7) retrieved 27 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2010-10-chemistry-nobel-prize-winner-lab.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.