

## **Ellis Benson Award**

**Purpose:** This award is the premier award of ACLPS to a young faculty member in recognition of meritorious accomplishment in the field of laboratory medicine. The Award honors the pioneering work of Ellis Benson in promoting research, service and teaching in laboratory medicine.

**Eligibility:** This award is intended for a young physician and/or scientist (ACLPS member or nonmember) working in the field of laboratory medicine. Primary consideration is given to candidates under 45 years of age and/or less than 10 years post-residency.

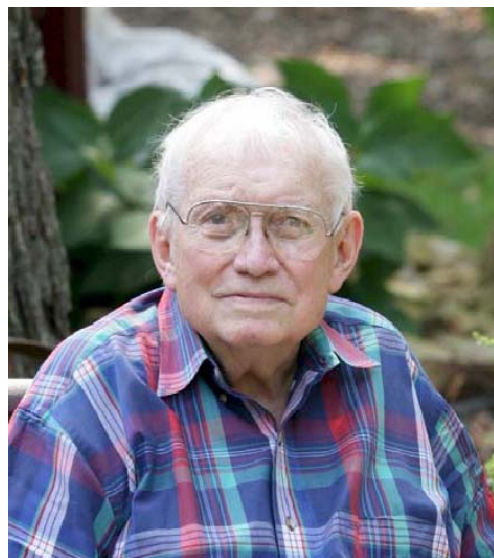
**Requirements:** The awardee will present a talk at the ACLPS meeting on his or her work. Award: The award consists of a plaque, a cash award of \$1,000, reimbursement of travel and lodging expenses, and waived registration for the annual ACLPS meeting in the year of the award.

**Selection:** The selection of the awardee will be made by the Nominating and Awards Committee.

## **Ellis Starbranch Benson: A Life**

Ellis Benson was born October 28, 1919, in Xuchanq, Henan, China, where his parents were American missionaries. Xuchenq is a provincial market city on the north China plain, south of Beijing. He spent most of his boyhood in China attending a boarding school for missionary children, a very pleasant school on a mountain. Those years strongly influenced his view of the world. After graduating from high school, he sailed to America.

In the U.S., Ellis enrolled in a small junior college in Wahoo, Nebraska, intending to become a chemical engineer. He soon realized that engineering was not for him and switched to a pre-med program. However, chemistry became a lifelong interest. He completed college at Augustana in Rock Island, Illinois, and then entered medical school at the University of Minnesota in the fall of 1941. Medical school was an eye opener. He was overwhelmed by the size of the University and the sophistication of his classmates, most of whom had taken their pre-med at the University of Minnesota. Ellis studied much harder than ever before and to his surprise at the end of the year he was ranked third in his class. (Medical students were ranked in those halcyon days).



Ellis graduated from medical school in September of 1944 because of an accelerated war time program. He left for his internship at Cincinnati General Hospital. After an

internship, he entered the Army as a medical officer in July of 1945. The war ended in August and his orders to go to the Far East were cancelled. Instead, he was sent to Germany, where he met his wife, Ann, the daughter of an American War Department civilian working with the U.S. Army Engineers. They were married in Hanau, Germany, in April of 1947.

They returned to the U.S. in May, and Ellis entered residency under Professor E.T. Bell in the University of Minnesota's Department of Pathology. There were two new residents in pathology that year, Don Gleason and Ellis Benson. Dr. Bell decreed that after one year in anatomic pathology, one of them would go to laboratory medicine for a year. Accordingly, a coin was tossed by the chief resident and, consequently, Ellis went to laboratory medicine and Don moved to anatomic pathology. Don went on to distinguish himself as the author of the Gleason system of staging prostate cancer, which is now used worldwide. Ellis spent a delightful year in laboratory medicine, mostly in chemistry with G.T. Evans. After laboratory medicine, He began a residency in medicine. In 1949, Ellis received a call from Dr. Evans offering him an instructorship in the laboratory medicine section of the Department of Medicine at the University. He accepted quickly and started in October of 1949.

In 1959 laboratory medicine became a separate department with Dr. Evans as chairman. Ellis Benson's research interests were in heart muscle proteins, notably actin and myosin. He soon realized that he would need more training in protein chemistry, so in 1957, he went to Denmark with his family for a year at the Karlsberg Laboratory in Copenhagen, where he worked with Kai Linderstrom-Lang.

It was a decisive year for Ellis. Lindstron-Lang was a world renowned protein chemist who helped him to embark on a new research program that used hydrogen exchange to help understand the basic structure and motility of certain proteins.

Back at Minnesota, Ellis became a professor in 1962 and then department head in 1966 when Dr. Evans retired. In 1965 a small group got together and planned a new society in academic laboratory medicine. The group was made up of George Williams, Ernest Cotlove, David Seligson, Jon Straumpfjord, and Ellis Benson. The society that became ACLPS came into being in 1966 at a meeting of a larger group in Bethesda, where Ellis was chosen to be its first president.

In 1970, Ellis spent a sabbatical year at the University of Rome in the Laboratory of Eraldo Antonini. As a result, he embarked on a research program on hemoglobin structure and red cell biology. In 1973, Ellis was asked to become chair of a newly merged Department of Laboratory Medicine and Pathology. The merger succeeded with great help from the faculty of both former departments.

Ellis became a trustee of the American Board of Pathology in 1970 and its president in 1982. Hi area of major responsibility was chemical pathology. He retired as department head in 1989 and as professor in 1990.