A MEMORIAL service to honour the life and memory of professor emeritus and senior research associate of the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Prof Patricia Berjak, is being planned by her academic colleagues.

Berjak, 75, who died last Wednesday after an illness, was cremated.

She had served the university for more than 48 years in various capacities, including head of department and more recently as an expert in the research office.

Berjak joined the plant biology department at the University of Natal as a junior lecturer in 1966.

She continued to lecture and actively supervise post-graduate students within the School of Life Sciences at UKZN, up until October 2014.

Pat, as she was affectionately known, was passionate about seeds and conservation. She was regarded as one of the best scientists produced in South Africa.

University spokesperson Lesiba Seshoka described Berjak as “one of the country’s few A-rated scientists who achieved a number of significant breakthroughs in the understanding of recalcitrant seeds, seeds that lack the ability to survive for long periods in storage, thus undermining food security in the developing world”.

Seshoka said Berjak’s personal drive, unrivalled work ethic and desire to make a difference had established her research group as one of the most respected in the field of recalcitrant seed biology, world-wide.

“Her innovative research has been highly recognised globally and her numerous accolades include being elected member of the Academy of Science of South Africa, a fellow of the University of Natal, the Royal Society of South Africa and the Third World Academy of Sciences,” he said.

Berjak was nominated, unopposed, as president-elect of the International Society for Seed Science and continued to serve the society over the last few years. She went on to reach even greater heights and received the Order of Mapungubwe (Silver), the highest honour granted by the president of South Africa between 2006 and 2014.

And she held a National Research Foundation A rating, signifying world leadership in her field, and received the NRF President’s Award for Lifetime Achieveme.

She always said that her achievements were a result of the contributions of many scientists, especially her husband Prof Norman Pamentner.

Berjak was an academic of note but she also pursued many other passions, including the English language, classic cars, aerobatics, ballroom dancing, photography, and detective novels.

The date for her memorial service has not been announced.

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PLAISED: Memorial service planned to honour the life of Prof Patricia Berjak.