

Congratulations Robert Smith, Winner of the 2000 Distinguished Alumni Award



▲ (From left): Bob Gold, dean, College of Mathematical and Physical Sciences; Winnie Smith; Bob Smith; Gary Smith; William Saam, chair, Department of Physics.

◀ Bunny Clark (center) shares a moment with the Smiths.

The Department of Physics congratulates Robert B. Smith, winner of the 2000 Distinguished Alumni Award. Will Saam, chair of the department, welcomed the Smiths to the ceremony at the Mershon Auditorium lobby, including their son, Gary, from Seattle, who accompanied his parents to see his father receive this honor. After a warm introduction by Bob Gold, dean of the College of Mathematical and Physical Sciences, Saam presented Smith with his award. Smith, who claims to dread public speaking, gave a delightful talk during which he reminisced about growing up in the shadow of The Ohio State University, where his father, Alpheus Smith (for whom the physics building is named), taught for 37 years.

One warm recollection included the memory of playing at the then-president's house, which at that time was located on campus. The house was eventually torn down to make way for Mershon Auditorium.

"I think we may be standing near the very spot where I spent many happy hours as a child," Smith said.

Smith completed his bachelor's degree with a major in physics in 1936 and went on to Cal Tech where he received his master's degrees in both mechanical and aeronautical engineering in 1938 and 1940, respectively. After graduation, he went directly to work for the Douglas Aircraft Company, El Segundo Division, as an aerodynamicist. He remained with Douglas, which became McDonnell Douglas, for his entire career of 32 years. During these years, his work consisted of wind tunnel testing, aerodynamic design, performance analysis, and preliminary design, primarily on U.S. Navy carrier based aircraft. During his first 15 years at Douglas, El Segundo, he participated in the aerodynamic design and development of 13 completely new airplanes. Six of these designs, all attack or fighter types, went into service with the Army Air Force and the U.S. Navy; two were research airplanes,

including the Skyrocket, which was the first airplane to fly at twice the speed of sound.

Smith held various positions at Douglas, El Segundo, including supervisor of Aerodynamic Design, assistant chief of Aerodynamics and chief of Preliminary Design. When the El Segundo Division moved to Long Beach, he became an advanced design project engineer, and he retired as chief advanced design engineer for Advanced Government Studies.

He has been a member of the Institute of Aeronautical Sciences and the American Ordinance Association and served as consultant to the director of Defense, Research, and Engineering, Office of Aeronautics, and has served on two NACA Advisory Committees. He is also a member of the OSU Presidents Club.

Since his retirement, Robert has worked on aerodynamic design and performance on a number of homebuilt airplanes and several Reno air racers. He and his wife, Winifred, reside on Balboa Island, Calif.