



“Education is what’s going to improve our society.”

— PROFESSOR EMERITUS WILLIAM WOLFE

OPTICS PROFESSOR HONORED FOR LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENTS

Educator, donor William Wolfe continues to influence the future of optics

In 1969, William Wolfe joined the teaching staff of today’s College of Optical Sciences following an accomplished career with Honeywell Radiation Center and the University of Michigan. During his tenure at the University of Arizona, he helped build the premier optics program in the nation—he educated doctoral and master’s students, taught countless courses, and authored numerous books and publications. His research influenced space programs, military defense and product development for many companies, including General Motors Cadillac.

Among colleagues, Bill Wolfe has earned a reputation as “the world leader in infrared optical systems,” said James C. Wyant, former dean of the UA’s College of Optical Sciences.

But the true scope of his influence continues as a professor emeritus. He’s known as a talented communicator, making optics accessible to the nonscientist, and he lectures often. He’s a donor to the University, as well.

In August, Professor Wolfe was honored for a lifetime of achievements in the private and academic sectors by peers in the field at an international convention of optical engineers. At the tribute—only the fifth ever held among this association of scientists—contemporaries presented papers based on his work.

Tucson continues to be home to this world leader. Professor Wolfe stays involved in the community by speaking to schools

and at public events about the importance of optical science in everyday life, and providing opportunities for others to discover careers in the field.

In 2006, he established the William L. Wolfe and Family Scholarship, in honor of his family, at the University of Arizona Foundation, with the hopes it will encourage students to “continue to give back to society all the things that optics can offer.” The scholarship covers tuition and expenses of graduate and undergraduate students in the field.

“When I was a student, I had a scholarship,” said Professor Wolfe, who majored in physics at Bucknell University, and earned postgraduate degrees in both physics and electrical engineering at the University of Michigan. He and his wife Mary Lou have two children who grew up to be Wildcats and now a grandchild, one of six, has graduated from the UA.

“My mother was a secretary and my father was a butcher, and without both a scholarship and a job, I wouldn’t have been able to go to college,” he said. Higher education, he continued, is everything: “It’s our future. Education is what’s going to improve our society.”

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