



Phillip S. Myers

PHILLIP S. MYERS

1916–2006

Elected in 1973

“For contributions to the understanding of ignition and heat transfer problems of internal combustion engines and their environmental impact.”

BY RODICA A. BARANESCU

PHIL MYERS was, arguably, the most influential engine combustion researcher of his generation, and he left a rich, unparalleled legacy of teaching, research, and service. He pioneered techniques for in-cylinder temperature measurements and made important contributions to understanding the diesel combustion process, droplet combustion, engine heat transfer, and engine modeling.

Phil was born in Webber, Kansas, to Earl and Sarah Catherine (Breon) Myers on May 8, 1916. After completing his B.S. in mathematics at McPherson College in 1940, Myers received a B.S. in mechanical engineering from Kansas State College in 1942. In 1942 he came to the University of Wisconsin-Madison and joined the Department of Mechanical Engineering. He earned his M.S. and Ph.D. degrees from UW-Madison in 1944 and 1947, respectively, and remained at Madison as part of the faculty, receiving tenure in 1950 and achieving the rank of professor in 1955.

He served the Department of Mechanical Engineering in a wide range of capacities, culminating in his stewardship as its chair from 1979 to 1983. He chaired and served on many College of Engineering committees. Myers also served on a number of campus-wide committees and was the chairman of the University Committee in 1974. Professor Myers was one of the rare individuals whose research excellence was balanced by his strong commitment to teaching and service. Phil's door was always open, and regardless of how busy his schedule was, he made time to answer students' questions.

Phil Myers together with Otto Uyehara founded in 1947 what is today the prestigious Engine Research Center at the UW-Madison. They embarked on an academic and personal partnership that lasted their entire careers. Together, Phil and Otto mentored 48 Ph.D. students and 80 M.S. students, many of whom went on to influential careers in the engine industry and academia.

After long and frustrating hours in the laboratory, in the library, and off campus, graduate students came to see the value of Phil's demanding attitude. His perennial stubbornness developed in students the invaluable qualities of perseverance, motivation, and perspective in difficult situations, all of which are important in succeeding in life as well as in a professional career. "The trouble begins," he believed, "when research becomes an end in itself. Research is essentially the tool that molds the graduate student into a capable engineer."

Phil sometimes used similar tactics with fellow faculty members. Indeed, as Professor Bill El-Wakil noted, "Phil's great contribution has been not only teaching students, but teaching faculty to be good faculty."

Professor Myers's teaching accomplishments were acknowledged with the Pi Tau Sigma Gold Medal Award, the Tau Beta Pi Teaching Award, and the College of Engineering's Benjamin Smith Reynolds Award. His most significant teaching impact, however, was made one on one in the laboratory with his graduate students in conjunction with Professor Uyehara. The alumni from their T-25 lab are spread around the globe, and as news of Professor Myers's passing circulated, the outpouring of well wishes was astounding.

Professor Myers retired to emeritus status in 1986 but was a constant presence in the department until shortly before his passing. He continued to serve on government and NAE study panels, including the committee that recommended the Corporate Average Fuel Economy (CAFE) standards for automobile engines. He served on Nelson Industries and Echlin industrial boards of directors and consulted widely throughout the engine industry, especially to International Harvester, Chevron, Cummins, General Motors, Texaco, and the U.S. government.

His research excellence was recognized by a long and impressive list of citations from the Society of Automotive Engineers (SAE), including the Ray Buckendale Award, and the Arch T. Colwell Award (twice). In 1977 Phil was named a fellow of the SAE, and in 1987 he was the first recipient of the SAE Medal of Honor. Phil Myers was also named a fellow of the American Society of Mechanical Engineers (ASME) in 1971 and was awarded the Dugald Clerk Award from the Institute of Mechanical Engineers (England). In 1973 Professor Myers was elected to the National Academy of Engineering (NAE).

Phil participated in SAE ever since his first contact with the society at the 1940 fuels and lubricants meeting. At that meeting he was a member of the victorious Kansas State College team, which debated that "higher compression tractor engines are to be preferred for tractor power equipment." After joining SAE in 1946, Phil served in all offices of the Milwaukee section. Nationally, he served as chairman of the power plant activity and, as a member of the Engineering Activity Board, helped start the Engineering Education Activity. He chaired the Publications Advisory Committee of the SAE Engineering Activity Board and was also a member of the SAE's Board of Directors and the Objectives Planning Committee. In 1969 Professor Myers was elected president of SAE, the first academic ever to be chosen for this prestigious position. The SAE has served as the preeminent international society of the mobility community since its inception in 1905 and currently boasts a membership of more than 100,000 professionals in 97 countries.

Through all of his success, Phil never lost touch with his rural Midwestern upbringing. He was a humble man who always made time to listen to all points of view and was guided by an unwavering moral compass and a dogged pursuit of the truth. His compassion for others was as legendary as his water skiing prowess and his fondness for churning his own ice cream. Yi Liu wrote in 2006 to his widow Jean: "I am writing you this letter because I feel that I owe Prof. Meyer a sincere 'Thanks!' Let me explain: I am a Chinese and I came to this country in 1999. I was first at another University and that time was for me like a disaster. I did everything wrong and I wanted to give up my study . . . I took a last look around to see if any miracle would happen . . . I sent an email to Prof. Meyers to ask for his advice. And shockingly, he replied sooner than everybody else. His letter was full of encouragement and he did take time to read my resume and to give me detailed instructions. His email was so warm and nice and, to be honest, when I sent such an email to this extremely outstanding professor I did not expect to hear from him at all."

Off campus, Phil's lively spirit and keen mind kept him active in community affairs. He was a member of the Board of Trustees of Shorewood Hills (the Madison suburb in which he and wife, Jean, made their home for many years). Phil and Jean were joint presidents of the local parent-teachers association. Both were active in the Methodist Church, with Phil playing a significant role in the church's Pine Lake Camp.

The Myers family was together whenever possible. So it was natural that one of their favorite hobbies was joint activity-camping. It was on one of their longer trips, to the Seattle World's Fair, that a grizzly bear bit Phil's arm while he was photographing it from the car. He carried the scars and used to joke about it quite often.

Phil's love of the outdoors did not stop there, as he was always athletically inclined. While at McPherson, he was an all-conference full-back (1938–1940). He enjoyed traveling, camping, waterskiing, and spending time at the family cottage near Westfield. He continued water skiing even after retiring and participated in a university exercise program, a scientific

project to determine the effects of exercise on the health of senior adults.

Phil was a man of principle who knew what he believed, but he always listened to and considered the opinions of others with respect. Throughout his life Phil was a teacher, mentor, father, and source of strength to his family, his students, his colleagues, and his friends. Gary Borman, a longtime colleague, summed it up: "It is difficult to say anything original about a fellow who has been as successful, both in the university and outside, as Phil has. Someone ought to say that Phil is a very fair and honest person—and a good man. Perhaps, after all is said and done, that's one of the best things you can say about anyone."

For the academic and engineering communities, Phillip S. Myers was a shining example of professional excellence, outstanding integrity, and significant contributions to advancing the state of the art of internal combustion engines. I have been privileged to have known him and benefited from his exemplary leadership, first as a Romanian visiting professor at UW-Madison, then as an engineer in the American automotive industry and also as a colleague in the NAE. His national and international impact continues through the many generations of engineers he educated and mentored.

Phil and Jean's generosity led to the Phil and Jean Myers Professorship in the Department of Mechanical Engineering, two Wisconsin distinguished graduate fellowships, an endowment for the Myers Automotive Laboratory (so named by the third-party donor who established the facility for undergraduate automotive projects), and the Uyehara-Myers Scholarship Fund, all at UW-Madison; several scholarships and faculty award funds at McPherson College and Kansas State University; the Myers Award for Outstanding Student Paper published by SAE and the Myers-Uyehara Outstanding Student Paper Award published by SAE India Affiliate.

Phil is survived by Jean, his wife of 63 years; daughters Katharine Muirhead, Elizabeth Baird, and Phyllis Rathbone; twin sons John and Mark Myers; eight grandchildren; and three great-grandchildren.

The support of the Myers family is greatly acknowledged. They provided and checked biographical information and supplied the photograph taken at Phil Myers's 90th birthday celebration.

