



G. C. Farnes

ROBERT C. FORNEY

1927–2016

Elected in 1989

“For leadership of chemical engineering research, innovative process developments, and creative technology management.”

BY ALEXANDER MACLACHLAN¹

ROBERT CLYDE FORNEY died August 3, 2016, at the age of 89. He was born March 13, 1927, in Chicago, to Peter Clyde and Hildur Hogland Forney.

If ever there was a role model for how a life should be led, Bob Forney illustrates one to near perfection. Possessed of enormous technical and managerial talent, which he applied throughout his career at E.I. du Pont de Nemours & Company, he shared those talents with many outside organizations and people. It is a pleasure to enumerate the many ways this vigorous, principled, and brilliant man gave back to others during his life.

He was an outstanding student at Purdue University (1944–50), where he received a BS and PhD in chemical engineering and an MS in industrial engineering. In 1948 he married his classmate Marilyn Glenn.

Immediately after graduation he joined the DuPont Company as an engineer. His ability to get things done right was soon recognized and he was put on the management fast track. To anyone who knew Bob it was quickly apparent that this was a man of amazing analytical abilities. And he was not

¹I appreciate valuable comments and suggestions from Marilyn Forney, Bob’s widow, who allowed me to visit her to discuss this tribute.

only driven by facts and figures, he was also kind. This was evident in his work as he oversaw some of the most important advances in industrial polymer and synthetic fiber manufacture, while he took care in teaching and professionally developing those who reported to him.

He moved rapidly through assignments at DuPont, including the development of many new polymeric resins, most notably Dacron polyester fiber. Following this and other achievements he was selected to head one of DuPont's major businesses, the Textile Fibers Department. He went on to become a member of the company's executive committee, which managed all the major capital investments and business strategies.

Bob's reputation extended beyond DuPont. He was elected to the NAE in 1989 and served on 19 studies and panels as either chair or contributing member. For example, he was a member of the National Research Council Panel on Technical Evaluation of NASA's Proposed Redesign of the Space Shuttle Solid Rocket Booster, which led to greatly improved safety of all subsequent space shuttle missions. For this service he received the prestigious NASA Public Service Award as well as the highly coveted "Silver Snoopy" award.

He was also a trustee for the Philadelphia Academy of Natural Sciences, and chair of the board for the Chemical Manufacturers Association (1988–89) and Advisory Board of the National Science Resources Center (a joint venture of the Smithsonian Institution and National Research Council; 1987–90), to mention just a few. As was always the case, when Bob agreed to participate in anything, he did so with effectiveness and enthusiasm.

As someone who worked directly under Bob for several years I can bear witness to his brilliance as an administrator and as a developer of people. He was known as a great guy to work for because of his demanding standards tempered by great humanity.

Bob never forgot the debt he owed to Purdue. He was a member of the Purdue Research Foundation for two decades and cochaired the Class of 1947 Scholarship Fund. The

Chemical Engineering Building now bears his name in recognition of his support to the department and the university. And Purdue designated him Distinguished Engineering Alumnus in 1974 and awarded him an honorary doctorate in engineering in 1981.

Bob and Marilyn were dedicated travelers—they visited 129 countries. They collected mementos from each culture and populated their home with furniture and other memorabilia that would remind them of the places they saw and the people they met.

Bob also specialized in model sailing craft and collected over 70 models in his travels. In 2016 he gave his collection to the Kalmar Nyckel Foundation for display in its museum in Wilmington, Delaware.

Beyond these extracurricular efforts Bob found time to involve his children and many of his grandchildren in his lifetime love of sailing, travel to exotic places, and even his love of acting, especially whenever “the Bard” was featured.

The Academy will miss Bob for his support and service since his election in 1989, and the Delaware educational, science, and engineering communities will also miss this man who unselfishly shared the intellectual gifts nature bestowed on him.