

Gathering Celebrates Life Of Bill Tebeau

by **Justin Much** Statesman Journal | July 22, 2013

“Make it a great day!”

That was William “Bill” Tebeau’s daily motto. It was also front and center Saturday in the brightly lit hospitality room at Center 50+ in Salem, where Bill Tebeau’s family give their patriarch a fittingly warm, often poignant, but overall cheery celebration of life memorial.

An engineer, educator and pioneer, Tebeau, 87, was the first African American male to graduate from Oregon State University, which he did in 1948. He died July 5, 2013.

Scores of well-wishers turned out at the center to honor a man who was described as at once deeply knowledgeable on many subjects and humble about himself.

Friends reached back to Tebeau’s early boyhood in Baker City through his well-respected years as an Oregon Highway Department (now ODOT) engineer and time spent as an instructor at Chemeketa Community College.

One ODOT land surveyor was among many who saluted Tebeau’s ability to teach, crediting the educator for putting complex material in a light that everyone could understand.

Gwen Carr of the Oregon Northwest Black Pioneers described a humble man who was difficult to interview because he would “turn around and ask me questions.”

From the Office of Senate President Peter Courtney

“Beyond all his many accomplishments, what a humble man he was,” Carr said. “What a kind and wonderful man he was.”

Family members individually and collectively delivered stories, uplifting prayers and music. The latter included flawless a cappella song sung by his granddaughter Mya and trumpet taps from his son David, who hadn't played in years but pulled it off at the service after a couple of initial misfires. Bill Tebeau also played the trumpet, as well as the violin.

Much of the celebration was uplifting and often humorous in keeping with the portrait family and friends' descriptions and stories portrayed of Tebeau.

His daughter Janine described a road trip during which she was just entering back into Oregon and running on empty when she had realized she failed to fuel up earlier. She was advised to call her dad, and when she did he asked her what milepost she was near. When she told him, he proceeded to instruct her to the next gas station – a Chevron, following a right turn about a mile away.

His daughter Cheri described a scene when his great-granddaughter, Kaila, brought a friend over to Tebeau's home, pointed to him and said “he knows everything.” Cheri said both girls stood over him and said “Wow.”

Tebeau's grandson, David Jr., pointed out that most of the family patriarch's legacy is female.

“As you can see, we are outnumbered by about 6 to 1,” he said. “And all us guys are named David.”

David senior shared perhaps his father's finest piece of advice: “Just strive to do what you want to do, and you will accomplish it.”

That Tebeau practiced his own adage was apparent in the memorial's recurring theme: “Well-lived life.”

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As an educator, Tebeau taught math, economics, thermal dynamics, physics, chemistry, and engineering – among other courses. He was named as Chemeketa's Teacher of the Year in 1970 when he was a part-time instructor.

He also worked with the Association of Engineering Employees to write a study guide for state examinations for engineering aide and highway engineering positions. In 1971 he was named Oregon State Employees Association's Employee of the Year.

He was also remembered as a devoted family man, survived by his wife of 62 years, Genevieve, seven children, 13 grandchildren, 12 great-grandchildren, and eight great-great-grandchildren.

Daughter Janine read a part of a homage sent by Tebeau's friend Mike Doherty.

Doherty described Tebeau as an educator who had something to offer everyone, had little use for praise, and was very comfortable with who he was.

"He was a good family man and friend and role model," Doherty said, "and one who had a life especially well lived."

