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Former professor Thomas Goldsmith was television pioneer

Thomas T. Goldsmith, Jr., was a brilliant scientist who devoted his life to technology and teaching.

When he died March 5 at his home in Lacey, Wash., he was memorialized in *The New York Times* as “a pioneer of television technology who with his boss, Allen B. DuMont, and others in the nascent industry, perfected the cathode ray tube” — the technology that led to the development of television.

Born in Greenville in 1910, Goldsmith graduated from Furman in 1931 and earned a doctorate at Cornell University before joining DuMont Laboratories as director of research. He went on to supervise the development of the technology, equipment and standards first used in the television industry.

Alexander Magoun, author of the 2007 book *Television: The Life Story of a Technology*, told the *Times*, “DuMont and Goldsmith helped pioneer turning oscilloscopes into full television displays. . . . If you remember black and white TV, you’re illuminating the entire picture tube screen so that you can watch moving video. DuMont and Goldsmith devised a variety of engineering and manufacturing techniques necessary to make that possible on a mass commercial basis.”

The initials of one television station DuMont launched, WTTG in Washington, D.C., are those of Tom Goldsmith. WTTG is now affiliated with the Fox network.

Goldsmith also received a patent in 1947 for creating what was likely one of the first interactive video games, which involved a beam of light shooting down an airplane on a screen. However, as Magoun told the *Times*, DuMont could not afford to develop the idea further.

After working for DuMont from 1936 to 1965, Goldsmith returned to Furman, which



had awarded him an honorary degree in 1959. He taught physics and directed the audiovisuals department at the university from 1966 to 1975.

In an interview with *Furman Magazine* in the fall of 1966, Goldsmith commented, “It is especially interesting, having been in industry, which is pretty cruel at times . . . to come back into education and work with students who are going to face up to industry.”

His advice to students was simple: Don’t just learn to be a scientist.

“I’ve seen students who have gone into industry,” he said, “who just level off there and never make any further progress because they don’t know how to do English; they don’t know history; they don’t know how to express themselves clearly. They don’t know how to meet people. . . . At Furman, students have the double advantage of being able to get both the humanities background and an excellent foundation in the sciences.”

Bill Brantley, who joined the physics faculty the same year as Goldsmith, describes his friend

as “a wizard with audio and video technology” who provided solutions to various technological problems at Furman, from laboratories to the Bell Tower. “Tom could make do in his ‘fixes’ with whatever equipment — or lack of equipment — he had at hand,” Brantley says.

But his primary memory is of Goldsmith’s “boundless energy, enthusiasm and willingness to help anyone and everyone who needed help.”

Brantley recalls in particular one cold, rainy night when the water pump at his home stopped working — which was a problem, since his family lived in the country and depended on spring water. He trudged into the woods to try to repair the damage, but worked for several hours with no luck.

“About 10 p.m.,” he says, “I called Tom to ask him a technical question. When he learned what the situation was, he said, ‘I’ll come over and help you.’” Brantley tried to talk him out of it, but Goldsmith insisted.

“Before long, I heard Tom coming through the dark woods to help. I couldn’t believe that anyone would have done such a thing at that time of night — except that this was Tom Goldsmith, and helping others was the mark of the man.” Soon they had the problem solved.

Brantley adds, “The other thing that stands out about Tom is his wife of 70 years, Helen. Their home was always open to their friends, and Helen is a legendary hostess and marvelous cook.”

In addition to his wife, Tom Goldsmith is survived by sons Judson and Thomas, daughter Virginia, six grandchildren and 10 great-grandchildren.

— JIM STEWART

Memorials: Providence SoundHomeCare and Hospice, 3432 South Bay Road NE, Olympia, Wash. 98506, or United Churches of Olympia, 110 11th Ave. SE, Olympia, Wash. 98501.