

Rites set for physicist, Robert E. Fearon, 89

By Staff Reports
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BROKEN ARROW -- Robert E. Fearon, a Tulsa physicist, engineer and inventor who designed a device that keeps shoplifters from walking off with merchandise, died Wednesday. He was 89.

A memorial Mass will be celebrated at 2 p.m. Tuesday at the Church of St. Benedict.

Fearon was born Nov. 17, 1912, in Spokane, Wash., and moved with his family to Pittsburgh when he was 12.

In Pittsburgh, he attended common schools, Carnegie Institute of Technology and the University of Pittsburgh, where he earned bachelor's and master's degrees in physics, chemistry and mathematics in 1933 and 1934.

He was on the graduate faculty at the University of Pittsburgh from 1933 to 1936 and taught nuclear physics and subsurface engineering at the University of Tulsa from 1950 through 1956.

He had moved to Tulsa in 1938 after marrying Ruth Belle Strothers, who died in 1981. Fearon moved to Broken Arrow two years ago.

Early in his career, he worked for Schlumberger Well Survey Corp. beginning in 1936.

In the following years he served as research engineer at Engineering Laboratories Inc.; as director of research in the nuclear laboratory of Well Surveys Inc.; and with Stanolind Oil and Gas Co.

In 1945 he spoke out against a congressional attempt to prohibit private research on atomic energy.

He said then that governmental efforts to prohibit the "private exploitation" of atomic energy would "hold back industry from doing the good and useful things that American industry can do with atomic energy."

He had been self-employed since 1951 as a professional engineer and inventor with more than 80 patents -- most relating to the petroleum industry -- to his name.

Some of his inventions were in the areas of well logging, seismic surveying and shoplifting detection.

His antishoplifting device, invented in the 1960s when Fearon was president of Electrochemical Laboratories Corp. in Tulsa, is still used in stores and libraries worldwide.

It incorporates an activated metal strip that is fastened onto the merchandise. A detector on the business' doors can lock the doors, set off an alarm or activate a camera aimed at the door.

Fearon was listed in "Leaders in American Science," "Who Knows -- And What -- Among Authorities, Experts and the Specially Informed," and "American Men of Science."

He was a member of the Church of St. Benedict, where he had been active in the choir.

He was an 18-gallon blood donor with the American Red Cross and volunteered with Boy Scout Troop No. 81.

Desiring to change the process of city government and to reduce the amount of government, Fearon ran for Tulsa mayor in 1992. He had been a candidate for a seat on the Tulsa school board in 1951.

He is survived by three sons, Lee C. Fearon of Manchester, Wash., George C. Fearon of Cayuga, N.Y., and Edward R. Fearon of Dallas; two daughters, Anne C. Gill of Annandale, Va., and Martha R. Mims of San Antonio; two sisters, Ruth Anderson of Cranberry Township, Pa., and Aldyth Jaffe of Cincinnati, Ohio; nine grandchildren; and nine great-grandchildren.

Friends are making memorial contributions to the Church of St. Benedict's piano fund.