

James A. Martin's Patent Letter Award, part 2

(As published in *The Oak Ridger's Historically Speaking* column on January 15, 2008)

Last week we learned about James A. Martin's pride in his career at Y-12 and the invention he made that resulted in substantial cost avoidance. We also learned of his involvement in Y-12's support of NASA's Apollo program to bring samples back from the moon. I need to correct a mistake I made in the last column. While James Martin was the first person to bring Teflon into Y-12, it was NOT ultimately used as the gasket for the moon box. A special metal gasket was used for that purpose.

Well, last week's column is not the end of the story. You will recall that I had put his story aside and was holding it to fill in when I had an opening in the *Historically Speaking* schedule. However, I never expected it to come up in the schedule the way it happened.

I got an e-mail from a Tammy Graham from Y-12's Office of Technology Transfer. She had gotten a phone call regarding James A. Martin's Patent Letter Award. It seems the award had been taken from the wall above his desk in his home and he was trying to get it replaced. He was quite upset by the theft of the award.

Tammy was contacting me because James Martin's daughter-in-law had mentioned my name as a person her dad had talked to at Y-12 and she was just trying to find anyone who could help replace the award. I recalled the visit I had made to his home and told Tammy that I had a photograph of the award. She wanted me to send it to her so she could determine when the award was given. I did that.

One day soon after that exchange, I happened to see James Martin and his daughter-in-law, Ruth Ellen Martin, in the lobby of The New Hope Center. He was looking for someone who might help him replace that lost award letter. I gave them a tour of the Y-12 History Exhibit Hall and some materials about Y-12's history that he seemed to really appreciate. I assured him that I would see what could be done regarding the award letter. I told him I had a photograph of it and if nothing else, I could get that printed for him.

All the while, Tammy's mind had been working. She was determined that this man should have his award. She called me and wanted to know if I could get her a good electronic copy of Roger Hibb's signature. She wanted to recreate the award letter for Mr. Martin. I figured we could do that. So, we searched for a document that had Hibb's signature on it and put a copy of that signature on a recreated letter of award duplicating the one that had been presented on January 5, 1973.

I thought, that is nice and James Martin will sure appreciate getting that letter. But, Tammy was not through, not by any means. She was pursuing a much more elaborate scheme and she was working it so that Mr. Martin did not know the full extent of what was being planned. She wanted to surprise him with a presentation of the award. She shared her plan with me and I agreed to help make it happen.

Tammy's plan was to recognize James A. Martin and his family at the upcoming annual awards for the Office of Technology Transfer to be held at Calhoun's on the Water in Knoxville. The event was scheduled for November 12, 2007 and his daughter was going to get him there.

Not only did his daughter bring him, three of his grandsons also came to the event to celebrate their grandfather's award. The event grew into something special for all the award recipients and the staff.

Tammy had succeeded in creating an event that everyone there appreciated. They also relished the idea of this elderly gentleman getting recognized for achievements in his career at Y-12. They could identify with his pride in accomplishments as they were all being recognized for achievements of a similar nature, though likely with less cost savings (remember the \$33,000,000 from last week's column!).

I was privileged to be at the ceremony to experience first hand the awe inspiring event and to see the joy and humble appreciation of James Martin when his past accomplishments were recited. I was able to get photos taken of the presentation and the family enjoying the event. I was able to eat dinner with them and to see the unbelief turn to amazement as the evening went on and it became obvious that James A. Martin was truly the guest of honor.

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Yet, I don't think I fully realized just how important this event was to that family until I got to read the handwritten note from Emily Davis, James Martin's daughter. Her note read,

"November 19, 2007

"Dear Tammy,

"On behalf of my family, I want to offer our gratitude to you for recognizing my father, James A. Martin, at the Awards Dinner held last Monday in Knoxville.

"I understand that it took you hours and hours to locate Dad's patents. Your efforts have truly made my Dad very happy and his family most proud of his achievements while at Y-12!

"Thank you, in a special way, for this wonderful and memorable evening and the recognition given Dad.

"On a personal note, Dad had his hands full with three active children and a wife who had more than her share of difficulties while he was at Y-12. He has never been one to 'duck' tough assignments, quite the contrary, he relishes great challenges!

"From our family to yours, we wish you a Blessed and Beautiful Thanksgiving!

"Gratefully yours,

"Emily Davis

See what I mean? Here is a case where an elderly gentleman and most of his family got to experience something often taken for granted by the younger generation and too rarely bestowed on our elderly. After all, the elderly are retired from the mainstream of our work places and out of the mainstream of invention and innovation...NOT NECESSARILY SO. But often it seems so to those who are elderly.

I want to thank Tammy Graham and those who helped verify the patents, recreate the award letter and most of all those who had the insight to realize just how important this recognition and replacement of the award was to James A. Martin and his family. It was a night they will long remember and the award letter is again proudly displayed in the Martin home.

For this family, that letter will now always represent far more than a mere framed piece of paper or a long ago award given to Dad and Granddad. Because of the responsiveness of a few individuals and the insight of the planners of a large award dinner, it now represents to that family and those who attended the event, the very essence of the heart of the people at Y-12.

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James A. Martin and family at Y-12 Office of Technology Transfer Awards Dinner, from left, Sam Martin, grandson from Chattanooga, Emily Davis, daughter from Cincinnati, Mr. Martin, honored guest, Joey Martin, also from Chattanooga, Ruth Ellen Martin, daughter-in-law from Oak Ridge, and Scott Martin, grandson also from Oak Ridge