

Lunch with a legend: Dr. Edward Teller

BY STEVE SHEETZ

Dr. Edward Teller, a native of Hungary, came to the United States, as many Jewish scientists did to escape the advancing armies of Nazi Germany. From the very earliest days of the Manhattan Project he was a central figure in the design and production of nuclear weapons and the materials to make nuclear weapons. He taught theoretical physics at several universities and viewed that as his principal occupation. He is often referred to as the “father of the hydrogen bomb” and played a major role in convincing President Truman that the nation should develop that weapon since the Soviet Union was known to be doing so. He was presented the Presidential Medal of Freedom in July 2003 by President George W. Bush. Edward Teller died at his California home in September 2003, at age 95.

Edward Teller presented a public lecture in Augusta, GA in 1992 and gave permission to CNTA to name the organization’s annual lecture and banquet in his honor. The Annual Edward Teller Lecture/Banquet is CNTA’s largest community activity. The lecture draws 450-500 attendees and is held in either Augusta, Ga, or Aiken, SC. The audience includes community leaders, elected officials and nuclear professionals. Some high school and college students also attend, courtesy of corporate and college donors.

Notable presenters include authors, industry leaders, a documentary director, senators, congressmen, a pioneer in nuclear medicine, national laboratory directors and many others, all with an impressive list of accomplishments.

Twenty-six years ago as a young engineer at the Savannah River Site, and a founding member of the Citizens for Nuclear Technology Awareness, I was truly honored to be invited to a luncheon – a luncheon honoring Dr. Edward Teller. Dr. Teller, the “Father of the Hydrogen Bomb” is an icon to the men and women across the country whose careers centered around making sure America’s nuclear defense always stood at the ready.

The history, the stories, and the vision he passed onto those of us that had the pleasure of his company that day was amazing. But in my memory, none was more inspiring than his tale of a young man he met, a student at A.R. Johnson. I so wish I knew his name, but this young man was one of many exemplary science students from around the CSRA that were chosen to meet with Dr. Teller that morning. Dr. Teller related that upon their introduction, this student greeted him in his native Hungarian tongue. Knowing the legend of whom he was to meet, the student had learned several phrases. What a show of respect and wonderful honor this action would have been from anyone, let alone someone in their teens.

In Dr. Teller’s words, he said he thanked him and said, “Let’s both speak English so we understand each other perfectly.” How prophetic in today’s world; may we all speak so we understand each other perfectly.



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Dr. Edward Teller



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Steve Sheetz and Dr. Edward Teller

Why I am CNTA: Kathryn Hauer

I’ve been a CNTA member and committee participant for many years. My husband and adult children are members, too. I’m a less typical member,



Kathryn Hauer

however, because I am an English teacher whose knowledge of science is minimal compared to that of other CNTA members. Even though I took science classes when I was in school and worked as a technical writer, I lack a solid understanding of basic science concepts. Radio waves, TV signals, engines,

and other science-based conveniences seem like magic to me. While I am not a scientist, I do recognize the danger of global warming and the fact the nuclear power is a “green” technology that can meet the energy needs of our nation.

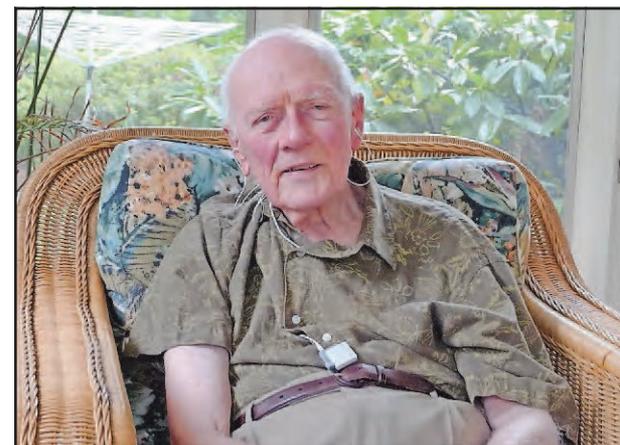
I like being part of CNTA because it offers me a chance to participate in an important mission – to further the public’s understanding and acceptance of nuclear power. It doesn’t matter that I don’t get the scientific basics of nuclear reactions; what is key is that the information CNTA provides is clear and accessible to everyone, not just scientists and engineers. I can learn more about the importance of nuclear power while being a part of a great group.

Why I am CNTA: Edward Albenesius

I came to SRS in 1952 after completing Graduate work in Chemistry at the University of North Carolina. My initial assignment was with Bill Reinig’s team, which was measuring the naturally occurring radioactivity at SRS before construction was complete and operations began. We analyzed 6,000 samples of soil and stream, river and well water. This work extended over several years and established the Site’s radioactive baseline, the first such studies done anywhere in the world. These studies also ran parallel to similar studies in the ecology of the Site conducted by the Philadelphia Academy of Sciences under the leadership of Dr. Ruth Patrick.

I transferred to the research laboratory in analytical chemistry, and worked there for three decades in a variety of jobs in management, environmental studies and low level waste management. Working in this research atmosphere was like walking on the frontier of nuclear science. The research lab was filled with a youthful staff who had studied under scientists like Glen Seaborg, creator of six elements beyond uranium; Herbert Gutowski, who created nuclear magnetic resonance; and Harold Urey, who discovered the isotope deuterium. It was a breath-taking experience, which I would dearly love to repeat.

When CNTA was founded, many of us believed, and still do believe, that the nuclear industry needs people who will step forward and say, “Let us explain what we are doing.” A lot of the fear that surrounds nuclear enterprises comes from myths and misunderstandings- we wanted to tell the



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Edward Albenesius is a retired SRS Scientist and a founding member of CNTA. He also is responsible for discovering that tritium is a product of nuclear fission in a process known as ternary fission. He was awarded the first “Distinguished Scientist Award” of CNTA.

truth and answer the questions. We are still doing that today, particularly as nuclear research and applications advance and concerns deserve consideration and honest answers. We still need to beat the drum. That’s why I am CNTA.