

# Aaron and Hill Named SWOSU Distinguished Alumni

04.18.2006

John W. Aaron

Benny J. Hill

Two individuals with close ties to the physics and mathematics programs at Southwestern Oklahoma State University are being inducted into the SWOSU Distinguished Alumni Hall of Fame.

John W. Aaron of Marble Falls, Texas, and Benny J. Hill of Sante Fe, N.M., will be honored at the May 13 SWOSU Convocation on the Weatherford campus and will be the featured speakers.

Aaron is a 1964 graduate of SWOSU with a Bachelor of Science degree in physics and mathematics, while Hill is a 1957 graduate with majors in physics and mathematics.

John W. Aaron began his career at NASA in the Flight Operations Directorate at the Manned Mission Center (now Johnson Space Center) in Houston. He quickly advanced to become Electrical, Environmental and Communications officer in Mission Control for the Gemini and Apollo programs.

Among his many contributions, Aaron devised the recovery for the power systems on Apollo 12 after the spacecraft was struck by lightning during launch, thus avoiding a mission abort. He also developed the recovery sequence for powering up the Apollo 13 Command Module to prepare for Earth atmosphere reentry after the CM was shut down to preserve power following a devastating explosion in the oxygen tank.

Aaron led the team of engineers that developed the flight software for the Space Shuttle Orbiter's onboard avionics system and eventually became chief of the Spacecraft Software Division. He also directed the earliest phase of the International Space Station program and was appointed to lead efforts to streamline and manage JSC's engineering support of the Space Shuttle and ISS programs.

Aaron's leadership led to better integration of the various NASA initiatives that provided the foundation for the Human Exploration and Development of Space (HEDS) initiative.

He has served as technical assistant to the director of the Johnson Space Center, manager of the Space Station Projects, and manager of the JSC Engineering Directorate, Systems Engineering Office.

Aaron retired in 2000 but continues to do part-time consulting work. He and his wife, Cheryl, live in Marble Falls, Texas.

Benny J. Hill started his career as a research assistant at Los Alamos Scientific Laboratory for two years before returning to SWOSU as a physics instructor for one year. He then returned to Los Alamos as a staff member performing computational modeling of various nuclear physics and other processes while taking graduate courses in physics and mathematics from the University of New Mexico.

In 1964, he returned to SWOSU and assumed the chair's position of the Physics Department which he held until 1990. His long and tireless service built the physics program into a nationally-known program which graduated 350 students. Majors in biophysics and engineering physics were added under his leadership and he started a Society of Physics Students chapter that even today is routinely recognized as one of the nationally outstanding chapters of SPS.

Hill was very active in placing graduates in jobs or graduate schools and maintaining relationships with alumni to build a very strong SWOSU Physics Alumni Association that ensured placement of future graduates.

His contributions to science education went far beyond the SWOSU classroom. He was a regular presenter at local, regional, state and even international science fairs.

In 1985, Hill began part-time corporate defense work for BDM Corporation. Following his retirement in 1990, he joined the company where he managed numerous invention, design, manufacturing, testing and evaluation programs critical to the United States defense and security programs.

Hill retired for a second time in 2003. He now resides in Sante Fe, N.M., where he pursues interests in history, Indian and Spanish cultures, painting, writing and photography.