



FOR RELEASE
JULY 15, 2011

CONTACT: Dylan Lane
865/546-4578

Tau Beta Pi Names Richard G. Higgins as 2011 Distinguished Alumnus

Tau Beta Pi, the engineering honor society, has named the 2011 winner of its Distinguished Alumnus Award. Now in its fifteenth year, the award recognizes alumni who have demonstrated adherence to the ideals of Tau Beta Pi (integrity, breadth of interest, adaptability, and unselfish activity) and to fostering a spirit of liberal culture on local, national, and international scales.

Richard G. Higgins, *Maine Alpha '79*, retired Boeing engineer and executive, is the *2011 Tau Beta Pi Distinguished Alumnus* and will be honored on October 29, 2011, at the 106th annual Convention to be held in Indianapolis, Indiana. Tau Beta Pi President Dr. Larry A. Simonson, P.E., will present a commemorative plaque, and a \$2,000 scholarship will be given in Mr. Higgins' name to a deserving student member of Tau Beta Pi.

Mr. Higgins' selection as 2011 Distinguished Alumnus recognizes his lifetime achievements and commitment to engineering education. His professional success and philanthropic activities have shaped the aviation industry and contributed to the development of the engineering profession.

Mr. Higgins holds bachelor's degrees in civil engineering and political science from the University of Maine and an M.B.A. from Seattle University. Before beginning his bachelor's degree he had a brief stint in the U.S. Coast Guard. He also took courses on executive studies at the University of Washington and Carnegie Mellon University.

(more)

Richard Higgins is a leader and innovator in the area of airplane safety. He spent 26 years at the Boeing Company, retiring in 2005 as vice-president for The Americas, after holding three vice-presidential positions.

A native of New Jersey, he joined the firm in 1979 as a structural engineer. His first assignment was with the 757-wind design group, before moving to service engineering where he helped airlines resolve in-service technical problems.

He is most proud of the airplane safety and maintenance work he accomplished as manager, director, and finally vice-president of maintenance engineering. He won the Aviation Week Safety award in 1999. Other duties included chairing and serving on the boards of several subsidiaries.

A long-time participant in industry activities, he has been recognized for his leadership and contributions to the Air Transport Association and the Aerospace Industries Association.

He recently embarked on a new career in writing and has received a master's in history from Vermont's Norwich University. After completing a novel, he is writing a book telling the story of the Red Army in World War II and has begun work on a biography of U.S. wartime aviation hero James "Jimmy" Doolittle.

Passionate about military history—especially the Civil War—since childhood, Richard says that, for him, the battlefield represents "the other side of the coin." Aviation brings people together to solve problems while war drives them apart. "It's very important to understand why humans resort to conflict to solve problems."

His love of military history became "an important part of my career" when, as an executive, he would travel the globe, discussing with world aviation leaders how Boeing could facilitate aviation in their particular country.

"But we couldn't talk about airlines all day and so this would give us common ground," he recalls. "I'd ask, 'didn't such and such a battle happen close by here?' It would open up a whole new discussion. They'd take me on tours of battlefields and everybody would go away feeling honored that I'd taken time to learn about their country. For myself, I gained great insight into their history and culture."

He recently endowed the Richard and Jean Higgins Materials Testing Laboratory at the University of Maine, where engineering students test materials like shear plates, concrete cylinders, and wooden trusses to determine their strength.

Mr. Higgins is currently on the college of engineering's advisory board. He helped to develop a new minor in engineering leadership and management. The curriculum, which includes courses on communication, environmental and business ethics, critical thinking and decision making, aims to provide undergraduate engineering and engineering technology majors with an understanding of how to achieve the vision and goals of an organization.

He and his wife Jean live in Santa Fe, NM, where he is president of his neighborhood's Tano Road Association. He is a board member of the Civil War Preservation Trust, Santa Fe Opera, and the Advanced Placement Initiative of New Mexico.

For his leadership, dedication to advancing engineering, and valuable contributions to society, The Association hereby recognizes Richard Higgins as the 2011 Tau Beta Pi Distinguished Alumnus.

Tau Beta Pi, the world's largest engineering society, has initiated more than 525,000 members since it was founded in 1885. Headquartered in Knoxville, Tennessee, the Association has 237 active collegiate chapters and 20 active alumnus chapters throughout the country.