

Athens Tech building renamed for former college president

By Lee Shearer | lee.shearer@onlineathens.com | Story updated at 11:58 pm on 11/18/2008

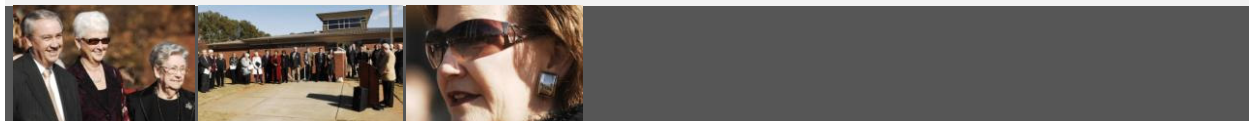
Kenneth Easom stands with his wife, Maxine, and his mother, Lucille, as a building at Athens Tech is named in his honor. Easom was the college's president for 17 years.

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Carol Williams, chairwoman of the Athens Technical College Foundation, recalls memories she has of former Athens Tech President Kenneth Easom.

The college renamed a building for Easom on Tuesday.

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Athens Technical College on Tuesday renamed the building that houses administrative offices and the school's library for former college President Kenneth Easom.

"It's probably the greatest honor I've received relative to my professional career," said Easom, one of only three presidents the college has had in its 50-year history.

Easom started work at Athens Tech in 1969 as a night counselor, was named president in 1985 and retired in 2002.

Under Easom, Athens Tech became the first technical college in the state to win accreditation from the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools; the first to offer a two-year associate degree in nursing; the first to offer an associate degree for paralegals; and the first, and still the only, technical college to offer an associate degree for lab assistant in biotechnology, according to Flora Tydings, Athens Tech's current president.

"You are a man to be honored," Tydings told Easom at a brief ceremony college officials staged Tuesday to mark the renaming.

Other business and community leaders also thanked Easom for his years leading the college.

"You have afforded a lot of people a very fine education," said retired Johnson & Johnson executive Ed Graham, a former chairman of the Athens Technical College Foundation board of trustees.

"This institution has always taken the lead in the technical college system of Georgia," said Carol Williams, chairwoman of the Athens Technical College Foundation. "We're indebted to you for your leadership."

When Easom spoke, he was brief, as usual. He said the college's success is built on the people who work there, from those who keep the classrooms clean to those who teach the classes.

"There's never been a better group of people," Easom said.

In an interview earlier, Easom said he had two main goals as president.

One was to broaden the college's training opportunities so students could learn more types of occupational skills.

When Easom began work at Athens Tech, the school focused on trade skills such as auto mechanics and welding.

But in the years since, training has broadened, particularly in health fields, he said.

Athens Tech also now is an accredited two-year community college, where students can get the basic college courses that students in all Georgia public colleges must complete.

Easom's second goal was to make Athens Tech's courses more accessible to students across the college's 12-county service area.

"It's a long drive from Hartwell to Athens, and still is," Easom said.

During Easom's tenure, Athens Tech opened a satellite campus in Elberton in 1997 and education centers in Walton County in 1995 and in Greene County in 1998.

Athens Tech has come a long way since it began as part of the Clarke County School District 50 years ago, Easom reflected.

"I can remember when I first started working with the school going with the director, Mr. Robert Shelnut, to Army surplus in Americus and Atlanta, picking up old pieces of equipment students could work on and learn on. We didn't have the money to go out and buy new equipment," he said.

Shelnutt and Easom would come back with valuable teaching aids they had scavenged, buying surplus sheet metal for welding classes and unwanted used cars for auto mechanics classes.

"Mr. Shelnut was a master at that," Easom said.

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