



Robert J. Thomas

June 5, 1942 – October 9, 2022

Robert “Bob” Thomas, born June 5, 1942, in Detroit, Michigan to Robert and Eirlys (Williams) Thomas, passed away suddenly and unexpectedly on the morning of October 9, 2022. Bob spent the previous day surrounded by his family and friends at happy, lively belated celebrations of his 80th year.

Bob grew up in Michigan and served proudly in the United States Air Force for four years in the early 1960s. After his military service, Bob earned BSEE and MSEE degrees, then became the first person to earn a Doctorate of Philosophy (Ph.D.) in Electrical Engineering from Wayne State University. After graduating in 1973, Bob became an associate professor in the School of Electrical Engineering at Cornell University.

During the 1970s, at the height of the OPEC energy crisis, Bob became a pillar of power system research at Cornell, considered an expert consultant in the power field for over three decades, until his retirement as a Cornell Professor Emeritus of Electrical and Computer Engineering in 2009. His expertise centered on power system stability, control of large systems, and economic and institutional impacts of deregulation. Bob authored over 100 technical papers in leading journals and conferences during his career. A Life Fellow of the Institute of Electrical and Electronic Engineers (IEEE), he received Centennial and Millennium medals, the IEEE Power and Energy Society Outstanding Power Engineering Award, and multiple teaching awards at Cornell.

Bob’s research vision and contributions went beyond publications in academic journals and the confines of an Ivy League institution. He was the first program director of the National Science Foundation in power systems, the vice president of the IEEE-USA for Technology Policy, a founding member of the Consortium for Electric Reliability Technology Solutions (CERTS), and a member of the U.S. Department of Energy Secretary’s Electricity Advisory Committee. As a member of the U.S. Department of Energy Investigation Team, Bob’s expert opinions directly

contributed to the Nation's understanding of the root causes of the 2003 Northeast Blackout, the largest blackout in U.S. history at the time.

In 1996, Bob became the founding director of the PSERC (Power Systems Engineering Research Center), a 13-university National Science Foundation Industry-University Cooperative Research Center. Thanks to his leadership as the center director during the first ten years, PSERC is a thriving university, industry, and government research consortium today, addressing pressing challenges in the continuing power and energy system transformation.

Obituary reprinted from Villages News