



HALL OF FAME 2021



Melvin Lee Ritter Class of 1955

Some of Melvin's earliest memories are of walking up the streets of Cumberland to go to school. And it was always up, never down, and always in the snow! With this tale he inspired all of his 6 children to keep moving upward and forward to meet their life goals.

Melvin relished his high school years, and reflected back on the happy times often. I have an extensive scrap-book which he kept. In it can be found: newspaper articles about the wonderful plays given by Fort Hill High. He also loved being in choir, particularly part of the chorus of "The Mikado". His beautiful baritone voice graced our Church choir performances for many years.

The scrap book also contains notice of his acceptance to the National Honor Society plus a newspaper article about his excellent grades in math and science. It is this that set his foot on his career path and, taking his own advice, he moved upward and onward.

Melvin moved from Fort Hill to the University of Maryland where he took a degree in Chemistry. Upon graduation, he accepted a position as a graduate student at the University of Houston, eventually achieving his PhD in Organic Chemistry.

He began his career work at Johnson Space Center Houston with Brown and Root-Northrup. His responsibility was to ensure that SkyLab components being planned for trips to outer space would not bring earthly contamination.

Melvin later hired on with the United States Environmental Protection Agency as a Senior Chemist in 1976. This was to be his life work for the next 42 years.

He served as an expert witness in Superfund clean-up efforts. This first trial established a model of success for future trials.

During his stint with the EPA, Melvin worked to ensure that the laboratory analysis was defensible in every aspect. He received numerous awards for his analytical efforts notably during Hurricanes Katrina and Harvey, and a drinking water crisis in Corpus Christi after a chemical spill.

Yet he somehow found time to serve as a softball umpire, as treasurer for our home owners association, and sing in our church choir.

Of all the accolades Melvin received in his life's work, I honestly believe the honor paid him by his beloved Fort Hill High School would be the one he treasured most. His character was formed by Cumberland and Fort Hill, and he never truly left.