



March 21, 2018 Wyandotte Distinguished Graduate Inductee



Dr. Robert S. Cohen Class of 1941

Robert Cohen distinguished himself as a physicist and electrical engineer whose accomplishments included research on the ionosphere and pioneering work to launch federal renewable energy programs. He was a world leader in the development of Ocean Thermal Energy Conversion, a technology that uses the temperature difference between cooler deep and warmer surface seawaters to generate electricity.

While at Theodore Roosevelt High School, Robert was a member of the National Honor Society and participated in Thespians, Stage Craft, WY-HI school newspaper and Senior Yearbook.

After graduating, Robert enrolled at Wayne State University, majoring in chemistry. He served in the United States Navy from 1944-46 as an electrical technician aboard a landing ship tank in the China seas. In 1947, Robert completed his B.S. degree in chemistry from Wayne State University. He earned an M.S. degree in physics from the University of Michigan in 1948 and a Ph.D. in electrical engineering from Cornell University in 1956.

Dr. Cohen began his career in 1956 as an atmospheric physicist at the National Institute of Standards and Technologies in Boulder, Colorado, later moving to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration National Environmental Research Labs, where he conducted experimental studies of the ionosphere that employed radio waves and radar as remote sensors. That research included operating a chain of radio transmitters along the west coast of South America. Impacts of those experiments include improved accuracy of the Global Positioning System (GPS) and protection of critical infrastructure, such as power grids, from solar storms and other adverse space weather.

In 1973, Dr. Cohen joined the federal renewable energy research and development program in Washington, D.C. as program manager, initially at the National Science Foundation and subsequently at the U.S. Department of Energy. He was charged with designing and implementing the federal ocean thermal energy research and development program. On

behalf of the U.S. Information Agency, Dr. Cohen also conducted missions to help scientists from other countries explore solar energy research and development. From 1985 to 1990 he led studies on energy technology policy at the National Academy of Sciences.

Dr. Cohen lectured extensively internationally and published numerous papers and book chapters on ocean energy and equatorial ionosphere exploration. Throughout his career, Dr. Cohen coached and mentored many young scientists and worked to strengthen scientific capacity in developing countries. Dr. Cohen retired in 1990 but remained active, working *pro bono* to promote the commercialization of ocean thermal energy technology. He was a passionate activist in advancing health care reform.

Dr. Cohen was a devoted family man. He was married to Carolyn Campbell Cohen for 52 years and thoroughly enjoyed his two children and three grand-daughters.

Dr. Robert Cohen passed away in 2016 at the age of 92. His life-long scientific research made our world a better place.