

James Seay Brown (1920-2013)



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James Seay Brown, 18-year Tennessee Tech University College of Engineering dean, passed away Nov. 22. Brown died at home, surrounded by his family.

Brown leaves an invaluable legacy at TTU's College of Engineering. He graduated from TTU in 1941, and joined the college's engineering faculty. His service at TTU was interrupted only by his service during World War II in the U.S. Navy.

During his teenage years in Gallatin, Tennessee, Brown's father wanted him to become an attorney. Having heard that engineering was a good foundation for law, he enrolled him at TTU, then known as Tennessee Polytechnic Institute. It was there that he met Virginia Lee Fritts, the woman who was to become his wife.

Brown served as chairman of the Mechanical Engineering Department from 1950 to 1961, when he was named Dean of Engineering; he stayed at that position until 1979. As Dean of Engineering, Brown was instrumental in securing accreditation for the College of Engineering's curriculum program. He was responsible for establishing engineering graduate programs at both the master's and doctoral levels, as well as the construction of the College of Engineering quad on campus.

In addition to his service as dean, Brown served for two years on the state's Board of Architects and Engineering Examiners. In 1972, he was named Outstanding Professional Engineer for Middle Tennessee. He was named a Tennessee Tech Engineer of Distinction in 1981.

Brown's legacy lives on at TTU with Brown Hall, the engineering building that bears his name.

Brown was a member of the First Baptist Church of Cookeville since 1946. There, he served as a deacon, taught Sunday school, sang in the church choir, and chaired two building committees that oversaw major expansions as well as serving on other church committees. Brown was also with the local Rotary Club and Chamber of Commerce, serving as president of each, and was chairman of the Cookeville Tomorrow campaign, which established Cookeville's Leisure Services Department.

Brown is survived by his wife of 72 years, Virginia Lee Fritts Brown. The two were married July 25, 1941. He is also survived by his son and daughter-in-law, Dr. James Seay and Linda Faye Brown Jr.; daughter and son-in-law Rebekah Brown and Dr. David Chaffin; and six grandchildren, 11 great-grandchildren, a sister-in-law, nephew and niece.