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Duane Pearsall, inventor of smoke detector, dies in Denver

Lived for seven years in Dillon
DAILY NEWS STAFF REPORT,

Memorial info

A memorial service for Duane D. Pearsall will be held in Dillon at the Dillon Community Church on Sunday at 1 p.m. A celebration of his life will take place Tuesday at 7 p.m. at WindCrest Retirement Center, 3235 Mill Vista Rd., Highlands Ranch.

Duane D. Pearsall, inventor of the battery-powered home smoke detector, died in Denver April 11. He was 88. According to his family, Pearsall was a quiet and humble man known to his friends as "Dewey."

He and his wife, Marge, were married more than 65 years, and they lived seven years in Dillon – until 2007. He could often be seen sailing his trimaran "Tri-

Umph" on Dillon Reservoir. In the winter he loved to figure skate at Keystone and learned to ski at age 53. Marge and Duane regularly attended the Dillon Community Church.

Pearsall is best known for his role in the invention of battery-powered smoke detectors. In 1976, the Small Business Administration named Pearsall as Small Business Person of the Year for Colorado. The same year the SBA chose him from among the 51 state honorees as National Small Business Person of the Year. President Gerald Ford presented the award in Washington, D.C.

Following these awards, Pearsall became a spokesman for small businesses he considered to be the "backbone" of the nation's economy. He made numerous trips to Washington, D.C. to testify before Congressional committees on small business issues. For nearly 20 years, he was a frequent speaker to business and civic groups and was an invited guest lecturer in colleges and universities. He helped found the Small Business Council of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce in 1976, and in 1979 he was chairman of the Colorado Small Business Council. From 1975-1978, he served as a director of the Denver Chamber of Commerce. From 1982-1989, he was a director of the Colorado Association of Commerce and Industry, and he served as its chairman in 1985-1986.

Meanwhile, he continued his volunteer activities promoting fire protection. In 1980, the Society of Fire Protection Engineers named him "Fire Protection Man of the Year."

In 1983, Pearsall became a co-founder and general partner in Columbine Venture Funds specializing in new technology, located in Denver. The Rockies Venture Club, an organization that helps entrepreneurs obtain funding, established the Duane Pearsall Entrepreneurial Award, given at irregular intervals to noteworthy business owners. Recipients have included John Elway, former Governor Roy Romer, Bill Daniels (posthumously), Denver Mayor John Hickenlooper, and Rick Patch for his work with early-stage technology startups.

Pearsall also played a major role in the creation of the Fire Protection Engineering Department at Worcester Polytechnic Institute, now recognized as one of the leading fire safety study programs in the world. In 1996, WPI awarded him an honorary doctorate degree in science.

Born in Pontiac, Michigan on March 3, 1922, Pearsall attended high school in Keego Harbor, Mich. After two years at General Motors Institute (now Kettering University), his studies were interrupted by World War II. Pearsall spent three years, from 1942-1945, in the Navy Air Corps, first as a navigator assigned to submarine patrol and later as pilot. He graduated from the University of Denver in 1947 with a B.S. B.A. degree.

Throughout his life, Pearsall adhered to the Christian faith. He was baptized at birth and again as an expression of his faith in 2003.

In addition to his wife Marjorie, his family includes four adult children, seven grandchildren and two great grandchildren. Friends who wish to honor his memory are encouraged to contribute to the Alzheimer's Association.