



*From University of Denver program on
Internet - DU TODAY - Thurs, May 6, 2010*

By Kathryn Mayus

Pearsall

Most Americans can thank Duane Pearsall for making their lives a little safer.

Pearsall, the University of Denver alumnus who invented the home smoke detector in 1965, died April 11. He was 88.

The discovery of one of the most important safety contributions of the 20th century wasn't on purpose. Pearsall was interested in the control of static electricity and began manufacturing static neutralizers for photographic dark rooms, explains his wife of 65 years, Marjorie Pearsall. During a test procedure to measure the relative efficiency of the product — to measure the concentration of ions — he noticed that whenever his assistant lit a cigarette or exhaled smoke, the rigged-up test instrument underwent unexplained "erratic changes."

"This was the crude beginning of the battery powered home smoke detector Duane introduced to the market in 1970 — and probably one of the best things ever to come from cigarette smoking," Marjorie Pearsall says.

Duane "Dewey" Pearsall was born in Pontiac, Mich. on March 3, 1922.

He spent two years at General Motors Institute (now Kettering University) before his studies were interrupted by World War II. During the ^{W/W}war, Pearsall flew planes in the Navy Air Corps from 1942-45 and attained the rank of lieutenant.

After being discharged, he attended DU on the GI Bill. During that time, he also taught flying at Englewood Airport. He earned his bachelor's degree in general business from DU in 1947.

He worked for the Honeywell Corp. for seven years and in 1955 founded the Pearsall Co., a manufacturer's representative for commercial climate control equipment.

He started Statitrol Corp. in 1963, and after developing the at-home smoke detector there, Pearsall worked with the National Fire Protection Association and regulatory officials in the building industry to change the uniform building codes to require smoke detectors in new construction. Soon, smoke detectors were placed in homes throughout the country.

Previous attempts by others to develop smoke detectors weren't practical and demanded too much energy. Pearsall's invention was the first to be battery operated.

He sold Statitrol in 1977. While he owned the company, it grew from just himself to more than 1,000 employees, many of whom were women that had never held paying jobs before.

"Statitrol was ahead of its time in offering many employee benefits including a generous profit-sharing plan, nurses on duty, childcare and transportation for those who needed it," Marjorie Pearsall says.




He was the recipient of numerous awards: “Fire Protection Man of the Year” from the Society of Fire Protection Engineers; “Small Business Man of the Year,” from the Small Business Association, which was presented to him in 1976 by President Gerald Ford; and an honorary doctorate in science from the Worcester Polytechnic Institute (WCI), to name a few. WPI

Pearsall helped found the graduate fire protection engineering program at WCI, and also was awarded the institute’s presidential medal in 2004 for his contributions as a “technical humanist.” The citation said in part, that the home smoke detector is “credited with saving upwards of 50,000 lives from deadly residential fires over the past 30 years.”

He was “an advocate and a spokesperson for small business,” Marjorie Pearsall says. He testified in front of Congress numerous times for small business, and said it was the “backbone” of America.

“He was fervently interested in helping individual entrepreneurs obtain both technical and financial assistance in launching new enterprises,” Marjorie Pearsall says. He guest lectured at the DU’s business school.

In addition to his wife, Pearsall is survived by sons Mark and Craig; daughters Maryann and Cynthia; seven grandchildren and two great-grandchildren.

-  Share / Save ↕
-  Print
-  [Subscribe](#)

Search for:

Search DU Today



Latest News

- [DU burglar draws maximum 60-year sentence](#)
- [No Middle Ground](#)
- [Dean has history fighting for human rights](#)
- [Yoknapatawpha](#)
- [Sigma Chi’s Derby Days raises money for cancer research](#)

Other News Sources

- [Pioneer Athletics](#)
- [The Chronicle of Higher Education](#)
- [The Clarion](#)
- [University Business](#)

Tags

[alumni](#) [books-academics](#) [books-arts](#) [current](#) [donor](#) [Editors Note](#) [featured](#) [Letters](#) [public good](#) [research](#)
[student](#) [sustainability](#) [this-month](#) [top10](#)

Connect With Us

- 
- 