IN MEMORIAM
ERIC BAKER BECKER

The Department of Aerospace Engineering and Engineering Mechanics and the world community in computational mechanics lost one of their greatest members with the passing of Professor Emeritus Eric Becker on February 23, 2013, at age eighty. A great teacher and mentor, an accomplished engineering scientist, an innovative and ingenious problem-solver, Eric Becker will be remembered by his colleagues, former students, and the engineering community as one of the great intellects and contributors to this subject in our time.

Eric Becker was born January 14, 1933, to Adelaide Goodenough Becker and Eric Baker Becker in Dallas, Texas. He served in the U.S. Army during the Korean War (1953-55). He earned a B.S. and an M.S. in Architectural Engineering from The University of Texas in 1957 and 1960, respectively. He was on the mechanics staff of the University of Alabama, Huntsville, from 1962 to 1963, following which he pursued a Ph.D. in Civil Engineering from the University of California at Berkeley, which he received in 1966.

Professor Becker was one of the first to bring effective computational methods to bear on problems in aerospace engineering, particularly in the design of solid propellant rockets. He worked at Rohm and Haas Company on such problems until he joined the faculty of aerospace engineering in 1966 and ultimately moved to the Department of Aerospace Engineering and Engineering Mechanics at its creation in 1968. He served as an active faculty member until 2007 when he became professor emeritus.

Eric Becker was known to be a great educator and teacher. Many students attended his ground-breaking classes in finite element methods and computational mechanics. He supervised graduate degrees of more than fifty-five students, many of whom today are research leaders in their own right. He was a founding member of the Texas Institute for Computational Mechanics (TICOM). He served as a graduate advisor for the engineering mechanics program for about fifteen years. A greatly admired professor, Eric earned The University of Texas at Austin Outstanding Graduate Teaching Award in 1978.

A pioneer in complex problem-solving in aeronautical, civil and mechanical engineering, Professor Becker’s work impacted a wide range of engineering and scientific fields ranging from solid rocket motors, electromagnetics, scientific computing algorithms, fusion research, design of elastomeric components, tires, computational plasticity and viscoelasticity, fracture mechanics, mesh generation, and principles for software engineering. His 1981 textbook on finite elements, co-authored with two TICOM colleagues, remains one of the top texts in the field even after several decades.

In addition to Eric Becker’s professional and academic achievements, he was a lifelong supporter of The University of Texas athletics. He was an intellectual, but well grounded by his avid interests in golf, poker, motorcycles, and other pursuits. He was as humble as he was intellectually extraordinary. Eric was an enormous
presence, but gentle and soft-spoken, with unwavering devotion to his family and most especially his wife, Candy. With her artistic creations and sensibilities, they were a wonderful team.

Eric is survived by his wife, Candy Gray Becker, of Austin, and his four children and their families, Allison and her husband, Ronnie Chapman, of Austin; David Becker of Los Alamos, New Mexico; Margie Becker and husband, Glenn Smith, of Austin; Elizabeth Becker and husband, John Van Ness, of Austin; and stepdaughters Margaret Lowry and husband, Andy Bradshaw, of Fort Worth, and Mary Lowry of Corona del Mar, California. He is also mourned by his eight grandchildren, Jennifer Bailey, Katie Smith, Joseph Jury, Sara Chapman, Emily Becker, John Patrick Jury, Charles Bradshaw, and James Bradshaw and two great-grandchildren, Jaxon and Brenna Bailey.

Becker’s friends, family, and former students have established a scholarship for graduate students in engineering mechanics in his honor, The Eric Becker Graduate Scholarship, which will be awarded annually as a tribute to his memory and his dedication to teaching and research in engineering and computational mechanics.

This memorial resolution was prepared by a special committee consisting of Professors J. Tinsley Oden (chair), Stelios Kyriakides, and Kenneth M. Liechti.

Distributed to the dean of the School of Engineering on September 3, 2013, and posted under “Memorials” at http://www.utexas.edu/faculty/council/.