UW 'science giant' dies

State Journal staff

A UW-Madison professor known as the "father of weather satellites" died Sunday at University Hospital.

Verner Edward Suomi, who was an international leader in meteorology and space science, died after a long battle with heart disease. He was 79.

Suomi, of Madison, joined the UW faculty in 1948 and taught until 1986 in the Department of Meteorology and Soil Science, as well as the Institute for Environmental Studies.

In 1964, Suomi served as chief scientist of the U.S. Weather Bureau, and in 1965 he founded UW's Space Science and Engineering Center, which he directed until 1988.

Suomi is best known for his invention of the "spin-scan camera," which enables weather satellites to monitor the earth continuously and provide the weather pictures seen on TV weather reports around the world.

"Verner Suomi was a giant of modern science," said UW-Madison Provost John Wiley. "His inventions were simple and elegant, and their consequences are ubiquitous."

Suomi won numerous awards for his work, including the National Medal of Science, which was awarded by President Carter in 1977. He also won the first Walter Ahlstrom Prize, which included a $55,000 prize that he donated to the UW Foundation for Research.

After his retirement, Suomi continued working at the center and teaching a weekly undergraduate meteorology course.

A memorial service will be at Luther Memorial Church, 1020 University Ave.; the date and time have not been determined.