

## Greater Huntsville Holds Remembrance Event

by  
*Ken Philippart*  
Images by Alan Lowrey

On a sunny, brisk day in March, the Greater Huntsville Section held its inaugural Remembrance Event. Fifty section members and family, friends and colleagues gathered on March 8 to celebrate and remember those departed section members who are commemorated in the US Space and Rocket Center Saturn V Apollo Courtyard. The event was a first of its kind for Greater Huntsville Section, if not all of AIAA, and consisted of a simple memorial at the brickyard followed by a group luncheon at a local restaurant to socialize, tell stories and remember the contributions of our departed members.



The Section instituted the memorial brick program in 2017. The program's purpose is to purchase a brick in the USSRC courtyard inscribed with the name and AIAA grade of each

departed section member. The program is funded through private donations by family and friends of the departed, supplemented by the annual operating budget. The USSRC set aside a separate section of the bricks for the exclusive use of AIAA. To date, ten section members have been memorialized with commemorative bricks.

To prepare for the event, the section reached out to the family and friends of the 10 members commemorated in the USSRC Courtyard. Several years had passed since the passing of some of the members, so a team effort was needed to track down contact info for the families. A plea went out to the Council and over half threw themselves into playing detective, scouring old member records,



*Family members and friends gather around the memorial bricks as MC Ken Philippart (far right) welcomes them.*

Facebook, LinkedIn, and personal contacts to locate family members. The team effort resulted in locating family and friends for all but one member and then inviting them to the event. Former colleagues of that one member were contacted however and invited to the event.

The response to the invitation was phenomenal. Since it was the inaugural event, attendance was originally estimated to be around 30 people. The USSRC graciously agreed to allow event participants to enter the courtyard at no charge and had originally requested the section limit participation to 40 people. Registration for the event exploded, however, and 58 people RSVPd to attend the event. The USSRC kindly agreed to waive the 40-person limit and allow all who wished to attend to do so. Thank you USSRC for your generosity and hospitality!

The first part of the event took place at the brick courtyard by the Saturn V.s. Council members Theresa Jehle and Naveen Vetcha greeted guests as they arrived, passed out a one page agenda and directed them to the brick area. Master of Ceremonies (MC) Ken Philippart welcomed the guests, provided a brief background on the brick memorial program and introduced Section Chair Greg Simpson. Greg welcomed the guests and lauded the incredible turnout, noting that several family members had driven from Birmingham for the event while one traveled from Dallas, Texas to honor her loved one. Following the chair's remarks, Section



*Secretary Erin Pierson reads the Roll of the Departed.*

Secretary Erin Pierson solemnly read the names of the departed members, as guests gathered around their names inscribed in brick. A recording of Amazing Grace followed the reading of the roll. Closing remarks and group photos concluded the brickyard portion of the ceremony and AIAA members and guests departed for the group luncheon at Terranova's Italian Restaurant.

The group re-convened for the second portion of the program in a private room at the restaurant. Each guest received an 8-page color program that contained a picture and biography of their loved one. Following additional welcome remarks by the MC and Chair, the roll of the departed was again read aloud, followed by a ceremonial toast by Naveen Vetcha. The invocation was delivered by Lisa Philippart. The guests then enjoyed a hearty lunch of Italian food along with shared stories of the memorialized departed. After lunch, family members were invited to cut the cake prepared for the event.



*Family members cut the cake.*

The section's inaugural Remembrance Event was a poignant way to remember our departed friends and colleagues. Attendance was almost double what was envisioned, especially noteworthy since the US COVID-19



pandemic was just beginning and the event took place the weekend before nation-wide lockdowns were put in place. Over 85 percent of registrants still attended, a visible sign of the support for the day of remembrance. The section received numerous personal and emailed notes from family and friends, thanking the Greater Huntsville Section for celebrating the lives of their loved ones. The section even received requests from family members who could not attend for

copies of the event program. One family member gave a generous donation to the section to help fund the memorial brick program into the future. Several attendees inquired about whether the Remembrance Event would become an annual occurrence. This event obviously struck a chord with our members and their families, who were extremely appreciative that AIAA remembered their loved ones, several years after their passing in some cases. The Remembrance Event brought tears to the eyes of family members, colleagues and AIAA members alike. When AIAA asked the section what made this an outstanding event, our answer was simple: AIAA taking care of AIAA and remembering, even after our friends have left us.