

The Eagle

Bryan-College Station, Texas ★ theeagle.com

TUESDAY

August 9, 2011

50 cents

Professor gets high honor

A&M's Kattawar named the Distinguished Texas Scientist

By VIMAL PATEL
vimal.patel@theeagle.com

Physics professor George Kattawar is a walking ad for Texas higher education: In a career spanning six decades, he did most all of his research and earned all his degrees in the Lone Star State.

He was recently honored as Distinguished Texas Scientist by the Texas Academy of

Science, marking the sixth time since 1979 that a Texas A&M professor snagged the coveted award.

He noted past recipients have included the Nobel Prize winning chemists Robert Curl and Richard Smalley, and world-renowned Houston cardiac surgeon Michael DeBakey.

"That's a pretty good group of people to be around, so I felt humbled and over-

whelmed," the Beaumont native said.

Friends and colleagues celebrated the world-renowned expert on optics at Texas A&M at what they dubbed Kattarfest, a two-day event last week filled with technical talks.

"He walks on water, and is known to all of us in the profession as an unassuming,

See **KATTAWAR**, Page **A7**



George Kattawar was honored recently at the Physics Building on A&M's campus after being honored as Distinguished Texas Scientist.

Eagle photo by
Dave McDermand

KATTAWAR: Went to A&M in 1960s

Continued from A1

nice guy," said Marlan Scully, the director of the Texas A&M Institute for Quantum Science and Engineering, of which Kattawar is a part.

The institute and the physics and astronomy department, where Kattawar is a professor, co-nominated the 73-year-old for the award given to a Texas scientist.

Kattawar's relationship with Texas A&M began a half-century ago when he was a master's student in 1960. He then earned his doctorate here and joined the faculty in 1968.

"I had a fellowship to MIT, but when I visited A&M, they were just so nice to me and rolled out a red carpet," Kattawar said. "I liked A&M. I always have, and I always will."

There were some major challenges during his time as a student, he said.

"There were no females, so it was pretty grim, but we survived it," said Kattawar, whose three grown children are Aggies.

His research topics have ranged from the depths of the ocean to the most pressing national security challenges.

Recent projects have included working in teams to better understand the camouflage mechanism in octopuses, and figuring out how to detect anthrax — the infectious bacteria-induced disease that terrified the nation following the Sept. 11 attacks — by using lasers.

His time at Texas A&M hasn't been all science. In 1982, he served on a committee appointed by then-President Frank Vandiver tasked with creating a Faculty Senate.

These days, he has taken up woodturning as a hobby, shutting off the phones and spending hours creating items — like the potpourri bowls made from Texas cedar for Scully and physics department head Ed Fry last week — while listening to classical music.

He turns 74 Wednesday, but retirement is not in the near future, he said.

"As long as my mind is functioning and I still get grants, there's not a more fun thing I'd want to do," he said.