



## IN MEMORIAM

Robert A. Matthews  
Senior Lecture Emeritus Geology Department  
UC Davis  
1926–2006

Bob Matthews was an outstanding colleague, educator, and friend. His personal generosity and insightfulness are best represented by his own words. The following is Bob's essay entitled "Reflections of a California Geologist" (Geological Society of America Special Paper 338, 1999, p. 480):

"My entry as a person of color into the geologic profession in the early 1950s was an interesting experience. As a young, recently discharged, Army Air Corps pilot trainee (Tuskegee Airmen), I found embarking on university life to be a new and exciting adventure. I was excited by the prospect of becoming a professional geologist in a time when job opportunities were bountiful, and the road to success seemed certain. With an undergraduate degree in hand and a few letters of recommendation from the geology faculty of a highly respected University of California campus, all looked rosy. However, after sending out 42 applications and having many interviews with petroleum and mining companies, my exuberance quickly waned. I received not one job offer, and only a few letters of rejection. After searching for many months, I landed a job with a small mining company with financial backing of an African- American businessman.

"This was not the most auspicious beginning for a career in geology, but it led to other positions in the private sector, the California Division of Mines and Geology, the USGS, academia, and as a private consultant. At present, although opportunities for women and people of color in geology have improved markedly, few people of color choose the field. There are many programs (including several with which I have been involved) that are actively attempting to encourage students of color to take geology, but these programs have had limited success. I hope that in the future we will find other avenues or approaches that will make the geological sciences become a profession of choice."

Bob's essay demonstrates his dedication to geology, his persistence in the face of adversity, and his commitment to helping others. These characteristics, combined with his cheerful and encouraging personality, made him an extremely appreciated and important member of our community.

Bob was born on June 16, 1926 in Augusta, Georgia. He had a passion to fly, and he enlisted in the U.S. Army Air Corps. He trained at Tuskegee Airfield in Alabama, and as mentioned above, he became a member of the Tuskegee Airmen, a famous group of the U.S.'s first black military airmen.

Bob attended the University of Southern California, where he also played basketball and football. He subsequently attended UC Berkeley, where he received a B.S. in geology. He first worked on a mining prospect in the northern Coast Ranges, and then became a District Geologist for the California Division of Mines and Geology (now the California Geological Survey) from 1956 until 1972.

Bob joined the UC Davis Geology Department as a part time graduate student in 1968, and his outstanding teaching skills were quickly put to good use. In 1972, he joined the faculty as a Lecturer with the goal of starting an Environmental Geology program. Putting his own studies aside, Bob became Associate Dean of Environmental Studies in the College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences for several years. He played a leading role in building environmental sciences across the Davis campus. From 1977 to 1979, Bob was on leave from UC Davis, serving as the Deputy Hazard Coordinator for the U.S. Geological Survey in Reston, VA.

Bob's University of California Davis career focused primarily on teaching. He was a leader in education at UC Davis. For many years, he was a one- person Environmental Geology Program in the Geology Department. He was a longtime mentor of minority students in diverse fields, including advising many students through MURPPS (Mentorships for Undergraduate Research Participants in Physical and Mathematical Sciences).

Bob remained active in research and consulting throughout his career. While with the Division of Mines, Bob worked in the Tahoe region on basic geologic mapping and environmental geology issues. He was the chief author of the idea to use volcanic cinder cones as a means of sewage treatment. Reaction of the sewage with the volcanic material filtered and purified the water, rendering it safe for release back into the Truckee River. This process was used for several years. He continued his interest in hydrogeology through studies in the East African Rift Valley, Kenya. In addition he and his student Neil Ingraham developed a means of detecting the contribution of fog drip to groundwater recharge in California and Kenya. For many years, Bob also served as a member of the California State Mining Board.

Bob officially retired in 1996, allowing him finally to pursue his Ph.D., which was entitled, "Environmental Geology, and Land Use Planning." He received his degree in 1996.

After Bob's retirement, the Geology Department was unable to replace Bob with a single person. Now the environmental geology program is handled by several faculty. The Department misses some of the close ties to industry that Bob maintained. In recognition of his long contributions to teaching and mentoring, in 2000, the Davis Campus named the Robert A. Matthews College, one of the Colleges of La Rue, after him.

Bob Matthews was a cheerful, upbeat person, always enthusiastic and always a ready contributor to the Departmental program. We all will remember his wisdom, and his ready smile. He was solid gold!

Eldridge Moore  
Dawn Sumner  
Jim McClain