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Inventor of Bar Code Returns to Dayton for Award

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INVENTOR OF BAR CODE RETURNS TO DAYTON FOR AWARD

DAYTON, Ohio — Paul McEnroe's name probably isn't familiar to you, but practically every item you've purchased in the last 20 years has his signature on it.

He developed the bar code.

McEnroe, who will be in Dayton to accept the University of Dayton Distinguished Alumnus Award, will talk about his work to develop the bar code at 3 p.m. Friday, Oct. 16, in Kettering Laboratories room 221 on campus. Admission to the presentation, which is part of Homecoming activities, is free and open to the public.

With just a few years of his professional career behind him, McEnroe, a 1959 electrical engineering graduate of the University of Dayton, was offered the chance of a lifetime by his supervisors at IBM. In the late '60s, the company handed McEnroe $300,000 and told him to start a new business. The only requirement was that he explore a field that IBM had not yet explored.

McEnroe jumped at the chance. Ever since graduation day at UD — when, as valedictorian, he discussed point-of-sale technology with Robert S. Oelman, president of the National Cash Register Co., who was receiving an honorary degree the same day — McEnroe had been interested in developing a universal product code system that would improve efficiency in the supermarket industry.

Though a few other companies were researching point-of-sale technologies at the time — Kroger was testing a circular coding method in Cincinnati — McEnroe's idea was different. Heading up a team of IBM researchers, McEnroe created a vertical-bar coding system and a laser code-scanner. The vertical coding system proved easier to read and easier to fit onto small products than other codes, and by the late '70s, McEnroe's UPC symbol was the industry standard.

"It's pretty well locked in now throughout the world," McEnroe says. "I'd be surprised if something developed to change that. I guess IBM was just a lucky place for me to be."

While McEnroe may credit the bar code's success to luck, it was his creativity and skill that kept his career on the booming technology and computer industry's fast track. McEnroe advanced quickly with IBM and eventually became head of the company's laboratory in Raleigh, N.C. While at IBM, McEnroe also developed a magnetic coding system for retailers to

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mark the stock keeping unit, or SKU, on department store items.

In addition, McEnroe modified the networking technology he used in linking supermarket laser scanners to create IBM's first local-area computer network. That system, known as the Token Ring, is used today by about half of the world's locally networked computer systems. The other half uses Ethernet.

McEnroe later became president of Trilogy Systems Corp., where he streamlined the company's development of multichip modules and presided over its merger with Digital Equipment Corp. He retired in 1992 and started a private consulting business.

For all of McEnroe's successes, however, he has suffered deep personal tragedy as well. In 1983, he and his wife, Ann Rawers McEnroe, a 1960 graduate of UD, lost their oldest of three children, a son, in an automobile accident on their North Carolina horse farm.

In 1990, Ann, McEnroe's "Dayton sweetheart," was killed in a car accident.

Though he's had his hand in several of the major technological developments of the past quarter-century, McEnroe says it is his interaction with "amazing" people that has proved most valuable to his professional career and personal growth.

He's also especially pleased with his current endeavor: reacquainting himself with the great outdoors. He and his second wife, Tina, purchased a ranch after marrying in 1994. On their 1,000-acre sprawl in the Santa Ynez Valley near Santa Barbara, Calif., the couple raises cattle and breeds horses. The ranch, he says, fulfills a childhood dream of retiring early and raising horses.

And while tending to the ranch, McEnroe is keeping up with engineering through membership in several industry organizations and the advisory council to the president of California Polytechnic State University, where McEnroe began teaching this fall. He has designed a course to help engineers enhance their presentation and marketing skills — skills he says he learned at UD but that many engineers lack.

"The engineering program at UD was excellent, but I think the thing that has helped me most was the emphasis on educating the whole person," he says. "I was on the debate team, and the public speaking skills I gained have helped me immensely. So many young engineers today can't sell their ideas. To succeed in engineering, you have to be able to convince a company to develop your product."

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For more information on the presentation, contact **Blake Cherrington**, dean of the School of Engineering, at (937) 229-2736.