

A Nobel Prize in the family

Corralitos couple see their son win award for chemistry

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CORRALITOS — Like thousands of other people in the United States, Bob and Ethel Herschbach spent part of December in Europe.

Their 12-day trip was a little different, however, because it included a visit with the King and Queen of Sweden, dinner with the U.S. ambassador to that country, and also a chance to see their eldest son, Dudley, receive the Nobel Prize in chemistry.

Dudley R. Herschbach, a science professor at Harvard University, was awarded the prize in Stockholm on Dec. 10 for his work on molecular architecture and basic chemical reactions. He shared the prize with another U.S. scientist, Yuan T. Lee, who studied for his Ph.D. under Herschbach, and a Canadian, John C. Polanyi.

Herschbach's parents, brothers, some in-laws, and four of the Herschbach granddaughters were among the audience of 1,300 attending the Nobel Prize ceremonies.

The Herschbachs said they were pleasantly surprised when they discovered what had happened to their son.

"We always felt that he would get it, but we didn't think he'd get it at such a young age," said Ethel Herschbach of her 54-year-old son. "You really can't describe the significance of the (award); the whole affair was beautiful," she said of the awards ceremony and the nightly banquets in honor of the Nobel laureates.

"They treated us royally; you never saw anything like it," said Bob Herschbach of the all-expenses-paid trip provided the family by the Nobel

Foundation. "We lived like kings and queens."

The Herschbach's, who have lived in Corralitos for the past 28 years, are originally from San Jose, where Dudley was born, and later lived in Campbell.

"He was a normal kid, very athletic, very studious, but very ram-bunctious," said Bob Herschbach. "He had a good young life."

It was while attending Campbell High that Dudley was inspired by a chemistry teacher at the school to go into mathematics, eventually giving up a promising football career at Stanford University in order to devote his time to study and research.

"He's one of the world's 10 best mathematicians," said his father.

Bob Herschbach, a retired architectural engineer, readily admits that he did not influence his son in regards to his career and adds that he does not understand much of jargon involved in his son's research.

As an example, he tells of the lecture that Dudley gave to about 100 top scientists in at the Swedish Academy of Science as part of the Nobel Prize ceremonies.

"I didn't understand a word he said, but I guess it was all right because they complimented him on it," Bob Herschbach said. "They

(scientists) have a language all their own."

The family returned from Stockholm on Dec. 17 and, if Bob Herschbach is correct, the family might be going back some day to see their son receive another Nobel prize for research he is currently conducting.

Bob Herschbach refused to elaborate, saying he wished his son to disclose his latest findings at the appropriate time. All he would say is that his son has been working on his latest studies for five years.

"He's working on something greater that will shock the scientific world," he said.



Bill Lovejoy/Sentinel

Ethel and Bob Herschbach are proud parents.