

# General Stafford Awarded Honorary Doctorate from SWOSU

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General Thomas P. Stafford has been awarded an Honorary Doctor of Humane Letters from Southwestern Oklahoma State University in Weatherford.

SWOSU President Randy Beutler made the surprise presentation at the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration of the Gemini VI mission held December 16 at the Oklahoma History Center in Oklahoma City. It is the first time that an honorary doctorate has been awarded by the university.

“The SWOSU community is extremely pleased to award the first-ever honorary doctorate from our 114-year-old institution to Gen. Stafford,” Beutler said. “He has been a great supporter and benefactor of this university, and we are extremely proud to honor his world-renowned and history-making achievements.”

A retired Lieutenant General of the United States Air Force and NASA astronaut, Stafford was born and raised in Weatherford. Even though he never received a degree from SWOSU, the man continues to support the university, western Oklahoma and Weatherford.

Stafford currently has the largest individual endowment with the SWOSU Foundation, and many Weatherford High School students are benefiting with scholarships from Stafford. At the time he started the endowment in 1993, there was not a specific endowment to help Weatherford students. At this point, around 150 Weatherford students have each received four-year scholarships to SWOSU because of Stafford.

Stafford is a 1948 Weatherford High School graduate who received his Bachelor of Science degree from the United States Naval Academy in 1952.

He has flown six rendezvous in space and holds the all-time world speed record of 24,791.4 miles per hour. He has flown over 127 different types of aircraft and helicopters and four different types of spacecraft.

Stafford served as pilot of Gemini VI (6) and served as commander on Gemini IX (9), Apollo X and the Apollo-Soyuz Test Project. Stafford was commander of Apollo X, which was the first flight of the lunar module to the moon. He performed the first rendezvous around the moon and the entire lunar landing mission except the actual landing.

He directed the start of the F-117A Stealth Fighter program and personally wrote the initial specifications of the B-2 Bomber.

SWOSU named a building after Stafford in 1996—the three-story Thomas P. Stafford Center.

Astronauts who saw Stafford honored at the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration of the Gemini VI mission were “Buzz” Aldrin, Alan Bean and Jim Lovell. SWOSU graduate Tom Weichel of Colony worked at NASA on the mission and also attended the event.