

Nobel Prize winner returns home

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News photo by Ben French

George Smoot, Upper Arlington High School alumni and winner of the 2006 physics, talks to students in the auditorium at Upper Arlington High School T

I was not the most outstanding student when I was here at Upper Arlington."

Those might sound like strange words from George Smoot, the 2006 Nobel Prize for physics winner, as he addressed UA High School science students Thursday.

But he explained them by

adding: "I cared about the learning more than I did the grades."

Smoot, a 1962 UAHS graduate, was in town to speak at Ohio State University. But took time to share his science experiences and offer advice to UAHS students enrolled in honors, Advance Placement and International Baccalaureate science courses.

Smoot shared how early discovery inspired his future science exploration.

Answering a student question about what piqued his interest in astrophysics, Smoot told a story about watching the moon out of the rear window of his family car as a young boy.

After questioning his parents about the moon, he said they provided him with answers that he believed was the beginning of his passion for the field.

"That piqued my interest in logical explanation," he said.

Smoot shared how as a young student at UAHS, he made a radio from a kit.

"I like to understand how things work" Smoot said.

He recalled how he was always working with his hands, whether it be working on bicycles or experimenting in the laboratory.

When asked how he made his decision to pursue degrees in math and physics and an eventual career in astrophysics, he told students they need to follow their passions.

"It just depends on your individual interests," Smoot said.

Students should choose a field that grabs their interest and follows their passions, he said.

"It ought to be something you really like and enjoy because sometimes -- it's hard work," Smoot said.

The University of California Berkeley professor shares the 2006 award with John Mather of the NASA Goddard Space Flight Center "for their discovery of the blackbody form and anisotropy of the cosmic microwave background radiation," according to a Nobel Foundation press release.

In 1989, Smoot and Mather led the building and launch of NASA's Cosmic Background Explorer satellite to look for telltale signs of the primordial explosion, according to a UC Berkeley press release.

The 2006 award was presented based on measurements taken by that satellite, which provided added support for the Big Bang theory, according to a Nobel Foundation press release.

But Smoot and Mather would have never been able to make their discover if they had not been tenacious in their efforts, he said.

"The first thing you can do is have confidence," Smoot said.