



Executive Director's Visit to Bell Textron

Upon walking into Bell Textron's Fort Worth facility, you are greeted by the Vertical Flight Society Heritage Site plaque — a fitting reminder that Bell is not just a participant in the vertical flight community but one of its pillars. My recent visit included lunch discussions and one-on-one conversations with Bell leadership and staff, including Jason Hurst, Al Brand, chapter officers and board members. What was immediately clear is that Bell's culture remains deeply rooted in excellence, continuity and, most importantly, people. Some build entire careers spanning more than four decades, like Dynamics Technical Fellow Tom Parham Jr., who is retiring this year after 42 years. Some pass through briefly, but they all leave shaped by their time at Bell. From the late Frank Robinson in the 1960s to the high-energy "505 days" under David Smith, Bell has consistently produced some of the very best vertical flight engineers in the world. That legacy doesn't fade; it defines you as both an engineer and a person.

Bell's commitment goes far beyond technical rigor. The company actively cultivates well-rounded, fulfilled professionals who are encouraged to engage with the broader community. VFS is part of that, an essential outlet for that professional and philanthropic drive. Bell engineers have helped build a scholarship program with no peer in an industry of our size. With their help, VFS awarded nearly \$140,000 in 2025 alone. The Vertical Flight Knowledge Initiative (VFKI), seeded by a \$25,000 gift from the Alex M. Stoll Foundation, represents the next chapter in that commitment, with Bell engineers already eager to support the new fund. Early donors to VFKI, individual generosity such as Al Brand's recent \$7,000 donation with matching from Bell Textron. Tom Parham Jr. further exemplified this culture of giving with a significant personal contribution of \$9,500 in December 2025. Benefactors of donations to VFKI include the students participating in the Design Build Vertical Flight competition, with 20 different universities competing in 2026. The winners from the fly-off will display their aircraft at the Bell Exhibit at Forum 82, with Bell again as the sponsor of Student Program. We are working closely with Ashley Vincent, Will Girard and the Bell team to deliver an exceptional experience for them this year.

Bell also capped off an exceptional 2025 with selection for Phase 2 of the DARPA SPRINT program under program manager Ian Higgins, continued certification progress on the Bell 525, and hit major program milestones with the MV-75. Sustaining this momentum requires continued investment in regional research and education to support Bell's long-term workforce. VFS will redouble its efforts to strengthen chapters and expand our presence at UT Austin, Texas A&M, and the University of Houston — critical pipelines for the next generation of Bell engineers.



■ Dr. Jing Yen, left, with VFS executive director Angelo Collins.

Later that evening, after a full day at Bell Textron headquarters, I had the privilege of having dinner with Dr. Jing Yen, his wife and his sister. Dr. Yen spent 31 years at Bell, ultimately serving as Director of Flight Technology and contributing to nearly every advanced rotor program along the way. His first assignment, an Air Force study on the aeroelastic dynamics of tilt- and folding-prop rotors (TR 71-7), influenced Bell's cutting-edge work today under DARPA's SPRINT program. Dr. Yen continues to give back through his annual \$6,000 donation to VFS for the Jing Yen Cost Awareness Scholarship, reinforcing Bell's long-standing tradition of generosity and mentorship.

VFS pride is woven into the very DNA of Bell Textron. It's part of its culture, passed from one generation of engineers to the next, and flowing stronger today than ever. We are proud of our shared history and optimistic about what lies ahead. VFS is working with Taylor Cox, Bell's Sr. Manager, Integrated Marketing & Experiential Events, and his team to bring all the Bell pioneers together next year for video interviews to capture their incredible technical achievements and fond memories as colleagues. Keep an eye out this year for a featured look at Bell's DARPA SPRINT work and the Bell 525, as the next chapter of vertical flight innovation continues to take shape. 