

Rao's retirement marks a new beginning

By Jamie Hutchinson

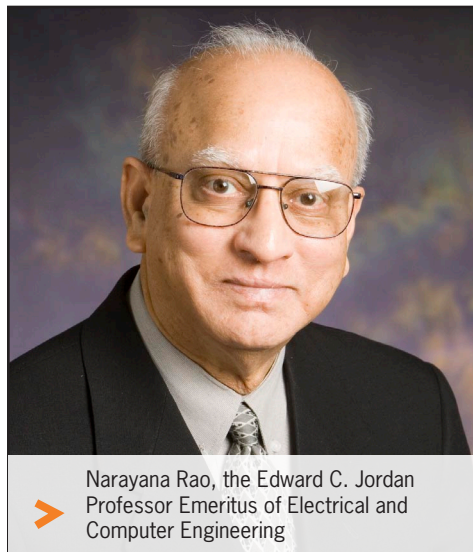
Colleagues, family, and friends of Professor Narayana Rao, the Edward C. Jordan Professor Emeritus of Electrical and Computer Engineering, gathered in Everitt Laboratory on May 11 to mark his retirement after 42 years on the ECE faculty. Rao served as ECE associate head for instructional and graduate affairs from 1987 to 2006, helping to shape the department.

Speakers at the reception included College of Engineering Dean Ilesanmi Adesida, ECE Department Head Richard Blahut, former Department Head Tim Trick, and current Associate Department Head Stephen Bishop. Blahut commented on the thousands of lives Rao touched as an administrator, teacher, and textbook author. Trick, who worked with three different associate heads as department head before filling the position with Rao, commended Rao for the stability he brought to the administration. "The associate head does the jobs nobody else wants to do, like teaching assignments and ABET," said Trick, referring to the accreditation process of the Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology. "And if he does the job well, the department head gets all the credit."

Rao remarked on his belief in the power of education—transcending the boundaries of national origin, race, and religion—to assure the future of the world. "Nowhere else on the campus is this more evident than in the ECE Department, which is the crown jewel of the campus," he said.

Rao will continue his service to the University, mostly by helping to

develop relations with his native India. Amrita University in the southern state of Tamil Nadu has named Rao its first "Distinguished Amrita Professor." During the summer of 2006, Rao taught a course in electromagnetics as the inaugural offering under the Indo-U.S. Inter-University Collaborative Initiative in higher education and research, an agreement between the Indian government, Amrita University, and 15 U.S. universities. Under the agreement, U.S. science and engineering faculty teach courses to Indian students using Amrita's e-learning setup and the Indian government's "EDUSAT" satellite network.



Narayana Rao, the Edward C. Jordan Professor Emeritus of Electrical and Computer Engineering

More than 850 students attended Rao's broadcast lectures at 22 centers across India. It was the first time students taking a satellite-based course in India could participate interactively with their teacher. A student hundreds of miles away from Amrita could send a signal to ask a question, then stand up and be seen and

heard asking the question in real time on monitors at other facilities in the network.

Another highlight of the course was the "Indian Edition" of Rao's longstanding and popular textbook, *Elements of Engineering Electromagnetics*, now in its sixth edition with an international following. Planning to travel internationally, particularly to China, Rao hopes to touch students and academics around the world with his books. In this spirit, Rao is at work on a one-semester book on fundamentals of electromagnetics for electrical and computer engineering, which will bear his joint affiliation with Illinois and Amrita, as an alternative to the present two-semester book. He also has announced an "Illinois Center for Electromagnetics Education" to be established at Amrita University. "A tree will not grow unless a seed is planted and nourished," he said.

Rao earned his BSc in physics from the University of Madras in 1952 and Diploma in Electronics from the Madras Institute of Technology, Chromepet, in 1955. He came to the U.S. in 1958 for graduate study at the University of Washington, earning his MS and PhD in electrical engineering in 1960 and 1965, respectively. He was hired to the ECE faculty in 1965. His research has focused on ionospheric propagation, and he has developed courses in electromagnetic fields and wave propagation. ●