Robert F. (Bob) Barfield, Dean Emeritus of the College of Engineering at The University of Alabama, has contributed significantly to the advancement of engineering education within the State of Alabama. His efforts have reached all levels, from Alabama’s primary and secondary schools, to higher education, to its citizenry.

Born on February 8, 1933, Barfield grew up in Thomaston, Georgia. He later attended the Georgia Institute of Technology, where he received a bachelor’s degree in 1956, master’s degree in 1958, and doctoral degree in 1965, all in mechanical engineering.

Barfield worked as a practicing engineer in California and Georgia before joining the Faculty of the College of Engineering at the University of Alabama in 1967 as associate professor. Rising to the rank of professor in 1971, he advanced in leadership within the College and served in the aerospace, mechanical, and mechanics departments before becoming dean in 1982.

During his tenure as dean, engineering education was dramatically changing, and Barfield was at the forefront at the University and among schools of engineering within the State and region. Not only did the College of Engineering grow in the scope and quality of its programs, but through his leadership, the basic approach of engineering education was forever changed.

One such change affecting engineering education was computerization of the curriculum. Barfield recognized that computers would profoundly impact instructional programs. However, the cost was astronomical. He developed a unique model to establish and fund state-of-the-art computer facilities that would later be duplicated by many other universities within the region and nation.

He was also instrumental in bringing to the University and state the Foundation Coalition, a multi-million dollar NSF-sponsored curriculum study. The university is now the lead institution in a select group of universities to develop a curriculum that many feel will be the model for the 21st-century approach to engineering education.

Barfield’s contributions to the practice of engineering have been widely recognized. His talents have taken him many places, particularly to the Middle East, where his assignments were often under the sponsorship of the Department of State. These assignments included the establishment of engineering schools, technical institutes and testing laboratories.

Barfield is a member of several professional societies and has received numerous honors and accolades during his career. He is a Fellow of the National Science Foundation Science Faculty and an ASME Fellow, and was selected as Engineer of the Year by the Alabama Society of Professional Engineers.

Barfield retired in 1994 and enjoys a full life of travel and visits with his two children, Kim and Rick.