Planes go better with Coke, and Whitcomb's why

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HAMPTON — Richard "Dick" Whitcomb now has his own personal airplane — a Coke bottle with wings.

The Hampton resident, who is one of the world's foremost aviation inventors, was presented the unique gift Saturday night when he was honored by more than 200 of his associates at NASA Langley Research Center.

The scientist recently retired after 37 years at the NASA center, where he was creator of numerous design concepts to advance aviation.

His discovery of the plane design Area Rule — demonstrating that what he calls a "Coke bottle" shape (pinched in at the middle) reduces drag and increased speed of aircraft with no additional power — revolutionized American supersonic planes. The design is used today on military planes throughout the world.

"I got the idea from a Coca-Cola ad-