Scientist to receive award in St. Louis

Dr. Richard T. Whitcomb, internationally known aerospace scientist, will receive the National Business Aircraft Association’s Meritorious Service to Aviation Award during ceremonies Sept. 13 in St. Louis, Mo.

Whitcomb, a researcher at NASA Langley Research Center since 1943, is the first local resident to win the award. He is currently head of the center’s transonic/aerodynamics branch.

He is being honored for his outstanding contributions during the past 35 years to research, design and development work with NASA, which resulted in two significant breakthroughs in aeronautical design.

In 1952, Whitcomb discovered and verified the aircraft design Area Rule, demonstrating that what he calls a “coke bottle” shape reduces drag and increases speed of aircraft with no additional power.

The design is incorporated in every American supersonic plane and has revolutionized the aviation design field.

Whitcomb is also inventor of the “supercritical” wing, which permits significant increases in speed and range of subsonic jet aircraft without

Dr. Richard Whitcomb

increasing power or fuel consumption. Most of this research took place in the

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1960s.

Both inventions are considered major contributions in advancing the critical goal of maximizing fuel efficiency while improving performance and safety in all aircraft.

The scientist received the Collier Trophy in 1954 for the Area Rule concept.

In 1974, he received the largest cash award — $25,000 — ever given to an individual by NASA for his supercritical wing. He also received the National Medal of Science, presented by President Richard Nixon; the 1974 Aircraft Design Award from the American Institute of Aeronautics and Astronautics, and the Wright Brothers Memorial Trophy from the National Aeronautics Association.

He is also recipient of the Exceptional Service Award, the highest civilian prize given by the Air Force.

In his current work, the scientist supervises development of ways to improve aerodynamic performance of aircraft at speeds close to the speed of sound and the practical application of these improvements to specific aircraft, including general aviation designs.

The NBAA award will be presented during the association’s annual awards night banquet at its yearly convention.

Whitcomb is the 26th recipient of the prestigious award, which is given to those individuals who, by virtue of a lifetime of personal dedication, have made significant contributions to the field of aviation.