

Scholar explodes myths in history of Tektronix

By ROBERT OLMOS
of The Oregonian staff

BEAVERTON — Writing the history of Tektronix Inc. was fascinating for three main reasons, says Marshall M. Lee, whose book on the electronics giant will be published soon.

For one thing, said the Pacific University history professor, Tektronix is one of the Northwest's greatest success stories "in terms of starting a business from scratch and having a global impact."

Also, said Lee, Tektronix's personnel management policies have earned the reputation of being among the most "progressive and humanitarian" in the high-tech industry.

And the personalities of the company founders and the people who surrounded them make up a portrait of "personal courage and personal genius," he said.

Lee will lecture on "High-Tech History, a Local Perspective," based on his yet-untitled book, at 7:30 p.m. Thurs-

day in the Oregon Graduate Center's main seminar room. The lecture is sponsored by Pacific University and the Washington County Historical Society.

His 230-page book, commissioned by Tektronix, will be published for Tektronix's 40th anniversary party on the Fourth of July. The book will be distributed to Tektronix employees and will be available to the public at local bookstores. There will be a printing of 50,000 books, with 10,000 in hard cover.

A consultant on corporate records and archives, Lee has worked on two other corporate history projects, one for the Standard Insurance Co. and another for the Equitable Savings & Loan Association, since defunct.

Lee was hired to build the corporate archives for Tektronix, and the company approached him with the idea of doing the book, he said. He worked on the volume for two years.

Lee said that Tektronix employees



MARSHALL M. LEE
"No ax to grind"

had tried to put together the company history but the projects had not fared well.

"They needed someone with no ax to grind," Lee said.

He said his intent was not to put together "a high school annual" or a history touting "corporate heroes." Instead, he attempted to write "a good, sound, scholarly history that was critical when necessary and complimentary when compliments were due."

The book explodes some myths, he said, including the one that the company was started in a garage. The truth is that the founders, Jack Murdock and Howard Vollum began the enterprise in a storefront building on Southeast Foster Road in Portland, later moving to a building on Southeast Hawthorne Boulevard.

"If you want to get technical, the company was founded in the Yeon Building in Portland, where the articles of incorporation were drawn up in the offices of Portland attorney James Cas-

tle, who later became associated with the company," said Lee.

Another myth is that Tektronix's touted personnel policies evolved internally. In fact, Tektronix followed the trend of the high-tech industry toward progressive personnel policies. Also, many of Tektronix's policies were adapted from those of an Eastern company, the McCormick Spice Co.

Lee said Vollum and Murdock met in the mid-1930s, when Vollum graduated from Reed College and went to work at Murdock's appliance store in Southeast Portland. Following correspondence between the two during World War II, the men joined forces in 1946 to start their electronics enterprise, which Lee said had a direct impact on the development of television and the first generation of computers.

Lee's lecture will be the last in a series sponsored by the university and the historical society. The public is invited to the free lecture.