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# Williamson

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## SUNDAY SPOTLIGHT

(Staff Photo) ERAD DAVIS  
Williamson native Rod  
Van Meter searches  
the internet during a  
visit to *The Righteous  
Brew*





# 'The Story's Not Over'

## The 'reinvention' of Rod Van Meter an ongoing saga

By **BRAD DAVIS**  
Staff Writer

**A**nyone who says Dr. Rod Van Meter has lived an adventurous 41 years on planet earth knows what they're talking about. Trust them.

From graduating high school at the age of 16 to working in such far-flung exotic locales as Japan and Finland, already he's experienced more than most would ever hope to in a lifetime.

And the adventure is far from over.

It seems just now to be kicking into high gear.

In April of this year, Van Meter started writing a new chapter in his

life saga, accepting a faculty position at one of Japan's premier research universities.

It's been a long and winding road leading from the little boy who wandered the halls of West End Grade School daydreaming of one day becoming an astronomer, or perhaps even a paleontologist, to the man who now teaches at a renowned university as an assistant professor under the scholar who

introduced the internet to Japan.

"I never would have predicted winding up in Japan," said Van Meter during a recent visit home. "If you had asked me at the age of eight where I would be living at 41, I would have said Houston (the home of NASA)."

But his pattern of renewal has remained the same. Van Meter has

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continually adapted to his surroundings and circumstances, allowing himself to become what one must be in his chosen career field: Versatile.

"I would say I'm always looking for a new experience," he says. "Looking back at my career, I've reinvented myself frequently."

It's a cycle that started almost from Day 1. And it's one that looks to be ongoing.

In the 24 years since leaving Williamson for the sun-drenched campus of Cal Tech in Pasadena, Cal., where he earned a bachelors degree in engineering and applied science in 1986, Van Meter has held a plethora of positions with varied institutions and corporations.

His first job after college was at the Information Science Institute of the University of Southern California (USC/ISI), where some of the fundamental work in developing the internet was done. While there he picked up

"They called and said they liked some of the research I was doing and wanted to turn it into a product," says Van Meter. "Unfortunately that project didn't work out. It doesn't always work throwing 40 smart people in a room and telling them to build something. Looking back we all make mistakes, but it's water under the bridge."

Despite the setback, Van Meter, as always, landed on his feet running. The Dotcom craze was in full bloom at that time, and job opportunities were prevalent. Van Meter latched on with a company that eventually was bought by Finish cell phone giant Nokia, where he worked on technology connecting cell phones to the internet.

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**- Dr. Rod Van Meter**

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tion, and now is an assistant professor of environment and information studies, teaching and doing research work in the field of quantum computer architecture at Japan's oldest and one of it's best private institutions of higher learning.

At least two Japanese prime ministers, one astronaut and numerous prominent businessman claim that country's equivalent of Yale as their alma mater. There Van Meter is working to push the envelope of computer technology as we know it.

The goal? Build a machine that would be the difference in speed between writing the number 1,000,000 and counting to it. The challenge is daunting.

"If you're teaching first graders how to add, you already know how to add," he says. "The problem is that I'm trying to teach my students cutting edge research and I don't even know all the answers."

Nobody does.



His first job after college was at the Information Science Institute of the University of Southern California (USC/ISI), where some of the fundamental work in developing the internet was done. While there he picked up his master's degree in computer engineering, but eventually became dissatisfied with his work and ended up, of all places, in suburban Tokyo, working for the Asaca Corporation, which develops television and radio equipment.

"I never expected that it would be permanent," the 1982 Williamson High School graduate says of his move to the other side of the world. "I figured I would go and I would try it, and if it didn't work out I would try something else. It seemed like living in Japan would be a challenging and interesting experience."

Van Meter was right. The move was challenging. It wasn't permanent, either.

Three years and two research projects later, Van Meter began to feel professionally "burned out" and personally ready to come back home to the states. At the beginning of 1995, he came back to USC/ISI, then two years later went to work for the Quantum Corporation of northern California. It was a move he felt he had to make.

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But it was around this time that the internal bug which has bitten so many in his family began to gnaw on Van Meter's spirit. He had taught a class during one of his stints at USC/ISI and had learned the rhythm of the life of a professor. He understood the measure of freedom it entailed, as well as the opportunity to go back to his passion — research.

"My family has a long history of teachers," he says. "It's considered a good thing to do. For a long time that had been something I wanted to get into."

So he did. Van Meter, along with wife Mayumi — whom he met while working for Asaca — and their two daughters, 8-year-old Sophia and 4-year-old Esther, went back to the Far East in 2003 so he could pursue his doctorate.

After receiving his Ph.D. from Keio University's faculty of science and technology last year, he was asked to come on board with the faculty of the well-respected school. In April Van Meter accepted the posi-

ing. "If you're teaching first graders how to add, you already know how to add," he says. "The problem is that I'm trying to teach my students cutting edge research and I don't even know all the answers."

Nobody does.

But it's that challenge that's the lure for a man who continues the reinvention of self. Which leads to the inevitable question: What, if anything, is next?

"I haven't figured that out yet," Van Meter says with a laugh. "I do like it in Japan, but at some point I would like to go back to the U.S., or find some way to go back and forth."

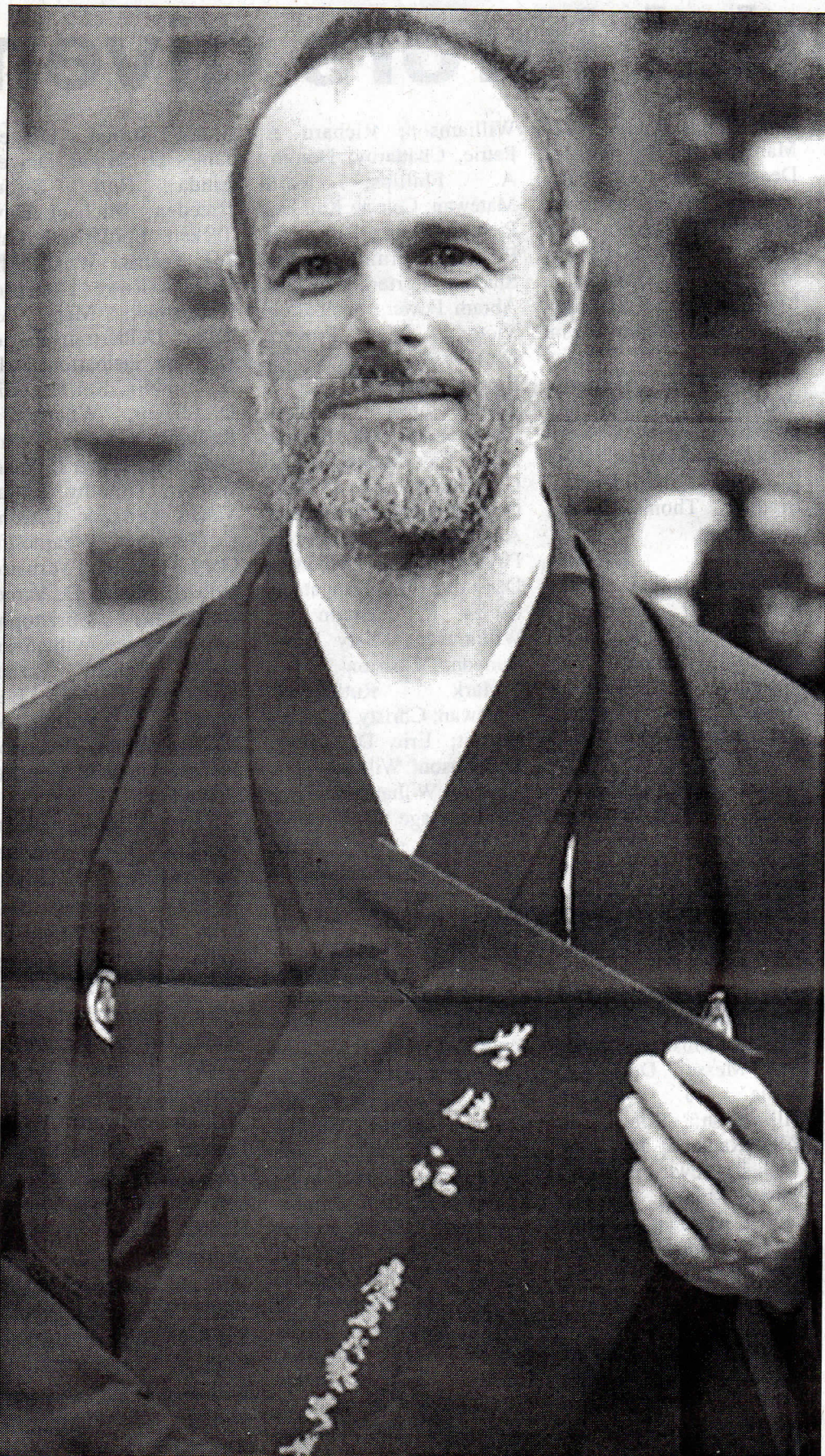
But for now, Van Meter and his family are satisfied right where they are. They are in the process of moving closer to the Keio campus where he works, which currently is a three-hour commute one way. He says he always looks to be in a situation where he can achieve his maximum potential, and although Van Meter has only been at Keio for a few months, he believes that's exactly the scenario he finds himself in.

But as has always been the case, with Van Meter there's always a "But."

"I'm happy with where I am and what I'm doing," says Van Meter with a long pause afterwards. "The story's not over yet."



**SAGA** from 1A



*(Submitted Photo)*

**Dr. Rod Van Meter shows off his well-earned doctorate upon the conclusion of graduation ceremonies at Japan's Keio University.**