

PPG Editorial March 29 1984

Fitting honor for Reddy

The French lived up to their reputation for making exactly the fitting and gracious gesture during the appearance at Carnegie-Mellon University of France's President Francois Mitterrand.

That moment came when President Mitterrand presented the coveted Legion of Honor award to Dr. Raj Reddy, head of the Robotics Institute at CMU, in recognition of his auxiliary work as chief scientist with the World Center for Personal Computation and Human Resource in Paris and as "a tireless builder of the networks of knowledge."

The World Center is involved not only in establishing computer networks to tackle France's problems - training unemployed French young people to use microcomputers is one example - but also to extend this resource to the Third World.

So it was singularly appropriate that President Mitterrand and the French government selected for France's highest honor the son of Madras peasants in faraway India who immigrated to the United States and by his brains, ability and hard work has become an acknowledged leader in the field of robotics.

President Mitterrand in his CMU speech had cited the Marshall Plan's success in reviving war-torn Europe after World War 11 in calling for a similar effort to extend to the Third World "a universal chain for the transfer of knowledge," one that would "step by step" touch all the populations of the planet."

A heart-warming aspect of the entire ceremony came during the actual presentation. Dr. Reddy started to move forward, but President Mitterrand motioned him back. Then the president walked toward Dr. Reddy to pin the medal on him, signifying that for that moment his was the place of highest honor - a beautifully French touch.

In his acceptance remarks Dr. Reddy said he had been impressed that Mr. Mitterrand, in discussing tile World Center's projects, didn't ask bow they could help the economy, but how they could help people. And the kindly, unpretentious scientist was quick to share credit with others at CMU, such as Dr. Allan Newell and President Richard Cyert.

Dr. Newell, professor of computer science, is one of the great pathfinders in the field of computer science and, in particular, in the developing field of artificial-intelligence devices. Dr. Cyert, as president of CMU, has capitalized upon the work of such as Dr. Newell and Dr. Reddy and Nobel Laureate Herbert Simon to move CMU into the forefront of American universities.

The ceremony and the French president's speech thus highlighted the international dimensions of what is going on at CMU and thus the potential for an increasing Pittsburgh role in the lives of people in developed and developing lands.