2003 Award Recipient

David S. Jenney '53

Dave Jenney, your dedicated and innovative leadership in the field of helicopter design during a 40-year career with Sikorsky Aircraft has made you a great source of pride for Worcester Polytechnic Institute.

Fresh out of WPI in 1953, you joined a newly formed helicopter research group with United Aircraft Research Laboratories (later to become United Technologies Corporation). During this time you studied many nights and weekends to complete your master's degree in mechanical engineering and, eventually, a Ph.D.

In 1962 you were transferred to Sikorsky as supervisor of aerodynamics, leading a team of engineers in helicopter design. In 1970, when the U.S. Army called for a new, small transport helicopter, your team answered. The design incorporated new airfoils and blade shapes, vibration absorbers, and most revolutionary of all, a canted tail rotor. The Blackhawk helicopter was born. Despite initial concerns that the angled tail "just didn't look right," the Blackhawk has been the Army's most dependable workhorse, with more than 2,000 aircraft delivered since 1973.

Success with the Blackhawk prompted your promotion to lead a team in developing pioneering flight test research aircraft: one for rotor systems research and a second for advancing blade concept demonstrations. Your focused approach to technical challenges led Sikorsky to appoint you director of technical engineering, overseeing 400 people supporting all the company's helicopter programs, including new designs, development and production.

Then the U.S. Army came calling again. This time, in 1980, they needed a small scout "Light Helicopter," one that could be stealthy, with low noise and a low-infrared signature. It was a great challenge. As director of engineering for light helicopters, and leading a team of Sikorsky and Boeing engineers, you designed the RAH-66 Commanche, which met all of the Army's needs. Beginning this year, at least 1,000 of them will be built.

To paraphrase a colleague, Igor Sikorsky created the helicopter industry, and you, Dave Jenney, bridged the gap between theory and practice, developing analytical methods and demonstrating steady improvement through experiment. Through it all, you managed to find time to run 19 marathons and raise a family.

With issues of national defense and homeland security so much a part of our collective conscience, your exceptional dedication to building a better helicopter is a contribution for which all of us are
grateful. It is an honor to present you with the Robert H. Goddard Award for Outstanding Professional Achievement.