2005 Award Recipient

Howard G. Freeman '40

Howard Freeman, for sixty-five years your dedication to your alma mater has known no bounds. As an involved and loyal volunteer, as a distinguished and effective leader, as a caring mentor to decades of students, and as a gracious and generous philanthropist, you have epitomized all that one could hope for in a WPI alumnus and friend.

You entered WPI in 1936 with the sobering experience of the Great Depression behind you, and the bright promise of educational opportunities to come. You financed your education with scholarships, loans, and a 35-hour-a-week job washing dishes at a local boarding house, and you found your special niche through football, debating, and study in mechanical engineering. You graduated in 1940 and embarked on a career as one of WPI's most successful inventors and business entrepreneurs.

As director of research for Rockwood Sprinkler Company, you received some 20 patents, including one for your invention of the fog nozzle, a device that created a mist that effectively smothered oil fires. The invention is credited with saving many ships and thousands of lives in the U.S. Naval fleet during World War II.

In 1954 you left Rockwood and co-founded Jamesbury Corporation to manufacture another of your inventions, a flexible seal that made ball valves more durable and reliable. Your invention revolutionized the valve industry and Jamesbury flourished - so quickly, in fact, that you had to seek larger quarters three times during your first three years of operation. When you sold the company in 1984, its nearly $80 million in annual sales and more than 1,200 employees made it one of the world's largest valve manufacturing firms.

You have said on many occasions how grateful you are for the WPI education you received, and you have dedicated yourself to serving your alma mater. You were elected to the Board of Trustees in 1969 as the WPI Plan was developing, and you frequently traveled to speak to alumni groups about its importance.

In 1984 you were elected chair by your fellow trustees. During your tenure the WPI endowment grew from $55 million to over $100 million, financial aid was doubled, and Fuller Labs, Founders Hall, and new athletic fields were completed. You also led The Campaign for Excellence, helping the university raise a record $63.7 million.

But perhaps your most enduring contributions to WPI are also the most personal. You established the Howard G. Freeman Scholarship Fund, and over the past 25 years you and your wife and partner,
Esther, have made it a priority, and a joyful experience, to spend time with dozens of Freeman scholars. Their WPI experience has been enriched not only by your financial assistance, but through the experience of knowing you.

Howard Freeman, on the occasion of your 65th Reunion, it is with great pleasure and true pride that WPI bestows upon you the Herbert F. Taylor Award in grateful recognition of your distinguished service and commitment to your alma mater.