2004 Award Recipient

Jonathan R. Barnett ’74

Jonathan Barnett, on the morning of September 11, 2001, the world watched in disbelief as skyscrapers crumbled into dust. Within days you were summoned to Ground Zero to search for answers in the rubble of the World Trade Center. A grieving nation wanted to know: Why did the Twin Towers fall?

You were selected for this important mission because of your extensive knowledge of fire and steel. Your credentials include three WPI degrees and a wealth of experience in fire safety engineering and building performance analysis. Your decades at WPI – as a student and a professor – made you uniquely qualified to ascertain what happened inside those buildings on that fateful day.

And yet, this was all in a day's work for you. As one of the first faculty members in WPI's Fire Protection Engineering Program and the assistant director in the early days of the Center for Firesafety Studies, you have devoted your life to designing a safer world. You were elected a fellow of the Society of Fire Protection Engineers and have served as president of the New England Chapter. Your research appears in publications and presentations throughout the world. Fire departments and companies from Canada to New Zealand have benefited from your advice. You helped establish WPI's Melbourne Project Center in Australia, where you now serve as co-director.

From fires aboard luxury ocean liners to infernos in nightclubs, you stand ready to help the public understand what went wrong and what safeguards are available. When tragedy strikes, the news media and government now look to WPI for authoritative explanations. As just one example, in 2002 you were called to advise the United States Congress on the findings of the World Trade Center Building Performance Study.

In a time of national crisis, you rose to the scientific challenges of the 21st century, bringing honor to your profession and your alma mater. You have distinguished yourself as a spokesperson for building performance codes and as an educator of tomorrow's fire prevention engineers. No one can estimate how many lives have been spared and will be spared by your actions.

Jonathan Barnett, it is with exceptional pride that we bestow upon you the Robert H. Goddard Alumni Award for Distinguished Achievement.