2003 Award Recipient

Professor Robert W. Fitzgerald ’53

Bob Fitzgerald, if ever there was an "unsung hero" at WPI, it is you. In the 40 years that you have been a professor here, you have touched hundreds, probably thousands, of students. You have always been one of those professors with unlimited time for students, especially those who are struggling and trying to find their way. You are consummately modest and most satisfied to work quietly in the background to support the mission of the institution. You have devoted your professional life to WPI and to its students.

In 1963, your academic calling brought you back to WPI as an assistant professor. During the ensuing years, you had a highly productive career, rising through the ranks to full professor and head of the Civil Engineering Department. You were actively involved in the discussions that led to the WPI Plan, believing in its underpinnings, and worked hard at its implementation. During the early Plan years, you developed an interest in fire safety. With you as the catalyst, the on-campus fire safety movement began to gain momentum. With your prompting, a student chapter of the Society of Fire Protection Engineers was chartered at WPI in 1974.

Under your leadership, more than 40 faculty members became involved in fire-related IQP projects during the 1970s. You became a strong proponent for the formulation of the Center for Firesafety Studies and a formal FPE degree program; the faculty approved the FPE master's degree program in February 1979. Though the program started with just a handful of part-time students, enrollment now totals more than 130 at any given time, with students coming from throughout the United States and 26 other countries. The FPE Program has produced over 300 alumni. All of this evolved as an outcome of the seeds you planted in the 1970s and your stewardship over the ensuing decades.

Bob Fitzgerald, you truly are an unsung hero. Your contributions to the mission of WPI have been untiring over a period of four decades. Your efforts have affected the lives of uncounted students and helped WPI establish its first-of-a-kind fire protection engineering program. It is with deep gratitude that we present to you the William R. Grogan Award for Support of the Mission of WPI.