2009 Award Recipient

Robert C. Labonté '54

Bob Labonté, your service to your alma mater has given you an unusual opportunity to directly touch the lives of WPI students, and they are better for having had the chance to learn from such a distinguished alumnus.

Your work with WPI students began in 1982, when you came to campus with an extraordinary offer. Your employer, MITRE Corporation, wanted to give students the chance to design experiments that would fly into space inside a special canister that MITRE had purchased. Eight years later, six experiments were carried into orbit on the space shuttle.

By that time you were deeply enmeshed in WPI. You began by teaching a course to help out when a professor went on sabbatical. That led to more teaching and to advising undergraduate major projects in the evening. When you retired from MITRE in 1993, WPI was delighted to have you join the faculty full-time and created a new academic title, Professor of Practice, to recognize the knowledge and remarkable experience you brought to campus. That experience included groundbreaking work at MIT Lincoln Labs and MITRE, including a solution to the problem of range ambiguity resolution in Doppler radars, a technique still widely used today, and vital contributions to NATO's air defense system in Europe during your two years as a member of the U.S. Embassy staff.

Your service to WPI has gone well beyond your role as an educator. You were a member of all of your Reunion committees, starting with the 25th, you chaired the matching gift program at MITRE, you were a solicitor for your 40th anniversary gift program, and you are a charter member of your class board of directors. Starting in 1987, you served on the WPI Publications Committee, now the Alumni Communications Committee; you've been chair since 1997. With your valued input, the committee helped shepherd the creation of the popular tabloid The Wire and, more recently, the university magazine Transformations.

Bob Labonté, in recognition of your contributions to WPI's academic and alumni communications programs, we are delighted to present you with the Herbert F. Taylor Award for Distinguished Service to WPI.