

2013 Denise Nicoletti Trustees' Award for Service to Community

Janet Begin Richardson

The Trustees' Award for Service to Community is presented in memory of Denise Nicoletti, a professor in the Electrical and Computer Engineering Department from 1991-2002, whose passion for life and outreach to under-represented groups touched many lives. Among her activities, Denise co-founded Camp Reach, a widely-acclaimed summer program which introduces seventh grade girls to the excitement of engineering and science. The recipient of the 2013 Nicoletti Trustees' Award for Service to Community is Janet Begin Richardson for her service to the community during the past 31 years.

In her various roles at WPI, most recently Vice President of Student Affairs, Janet's focus was always on the students. Colleagues describe her as collegial, good humored, a great leader, a consensus builder, and committed to excellence. She's the type of person who, as one colleague describes "always makes time for that personal touch."

Janet was the first woman to hold a vice presidential post at WPI. She has shared her talents as a leader by serving as an advocate and friend to female students. She provided guidance to many and worked to make the campus a place where aspiring young women can take on leadership roles and flourish. The committee feels, this among other aspects of Janet's contributions to WPI, particularly embodies the spirit of Denise Nicoletti. Under her leadership the offices of Diversity and Women's programs were established. A champion of the benefits and value of Greek life at WPI, Janet was an advocate in helping to build social systems which compliment WPI academics. She worked to strengthen Greek life, the campus judicial system, and student government. Janet has authored and served as the principal investigator for several grants which enabled WPI to create programs and provide education in the critical areas of Alcohol, Drug, and Violence Prevention.

Janet was instrumental in the vision, design and implementation of various building projects on campus. Her involvement with campus construction began with Founders Hall which opened in 1985. In September 1993, Janet, at the time serving as Dean of Student Life, reported "the search for the third tower is over." She had been charged by President Strauss to deliver an official report to the Trustees on an overall program for the Campus Center. Janet chaired the Campus Center Committee which opened in March 2001. One faculty colleague commented that "Janet had a vision of the campus center as WPI's Living Room,' a place where all segments of our community could come together and which everyone could utilize on a daily basis." One only needs to step into the campus center today, to realize this vision has become a reality. She has

been involved in many other campus construction projects, serving WPI students and meeting campus evolving needs, including East Hall and the new Recreation Center. When East Hall opened, Janet commented that “the building is designed specifically with the students' needs and expectations in mind, including their desire for privacy, independence, safety, and security.” Again, these words demonstrate her student-focused approach.

Janet, years ago worked to obtain a grant to have an Americorps volunteer who could facilitate WPI students community service efforts. The campus center became home to a community service center, and WPI students provide thousands of hours of service each year. WPI’s community service center serves as a model for other institutions.

Her service beyond WPI is broad ranging. She served 10 years on the Colleges of Worcester Consortium Chief Student Affairs Officers Committee, where she was a “cherished” chair for two years. In this role, Janet “could always be relied upon to be a voice of considered reason, a strong leader with mature team-building skills, and a visionary to promote and implement quality programs.” She has been involved with local school boards and spent time on the board of the Jewish Family Services Worcester, among other local organizations.

In 2009 WPI was recognized by Princeton Review as being home to ‘Happiest Students.’ At that time Janet commented: "While WPI is known to be an intensely research-focused university that stresses science, technology, engineering, and mathematics, there is plenty of fun to be had here as well." Thanks to Janet for providing years of leadership in student affairs to make WPI not only a place of serious academics, but helping to make WPI a fun place to be.

For her years of dedication to WPI and the surrounding communities, we are proud to honor Janet Begin Richardson for the 2013 Denise Nicoletti Trustees’ Award for Service to the Community.