

## **2003 Denise Nicoletti Trustees' Award for Service to Community**

### **James P. O'Rourke**

The Trustees' Award for Service to Community has been established in memory of Denise Nicoletti, a faculty member in the Electrical and Computer Engineering Department from 1991-2002, whose passion for life and humanity touched many lives. This award is intended to keep her spirit alive, a way for us all to celebrate and appreciate those among us who give so much of themselves to serve the needs of a community, and who show genuine care for the enrichment of life for others. This year we are pleased to recognize as the inaugural recipient of this award an individual who truly embodies the spirit of Denise, James P. O'Rourke.

Jim received his B.S. and M.S. degrees in Electrical Engineering from WPI and has been on the staff of the ECE department since 1973. He is well known to students and faculty members as someone who regularly goes far beyond his job description as senior electrical engineer and manager of the electronics shop. Indeed, a colleague maintains that Jim's title should be "Volunteer Extraordinaire," as he offers his personal time and shares his broad interests and expertise to help anyone in need. This aspect of his character is evident in the many ways he gives of himself, both within and outside the WPI community.

In the ECE department, Jim relishes a teaching role and volunteers to help faculty with laboratory teaching, doing a superb job even though it's not among his assigned duties. Jim has been here on weekends, bringing his children to help him get ready for labs at the start of a new term. Jim is ready to help students from every department with their electrical and electronics problems. Staff and faculty from departments with no electronics support regularly come to him for assistance. In addition, Jim fields all of the phone calls that come from people in Worcester who simply want to talk to an electrical engineer because something "odd" is happening in their house. Being the volunteer that he is, this has resulted in many a side trip to someone's house before he goes home to dinner, in order to rectify what he suspects might be a "questionable situation."

Many of Jim's other services are connected to his passion for astronomy. Jim constructed and ran the Astronomical Observatory that sat atop Goddard Hall from 1975-1982. He volunteered many a late night to students who wanted to share his view of the universe, and served as advisor to WPI's astronomy club. Continuing a role he held in the Air Force many years ago, he has been volunteering as the Worcester area sightings investigator to the National Investigations Committee on Aerial Phenomena and the Center for UFO services.

In addition, Jim has assisted the hearing impaired community by spending time on the phone explaining the options available to hearing impaired children. He helps people discover that the hearing impaired can attend any school and attain any degree of education, as did his daughter, a graduate of WPI.

Jim has also taught evening courses in local community colleges since 1970, and a colleague has observed that he provides additional time to his students and to the schools, probably double the hours for which he is paid. He seems especially dedicated to working with students who were once employed and now looking for a new start in life. He holds a black belt in karate and has been a volunteer martial arts instructor for 14 years.

For thirty years of giving to the WPI community and communities beyond, it is with pride and gratitude that we honor Jim O'Rourke with the 2003 Denise Nicoletti Trustees' Award for Service to Community.