2009 Denise Nicoletti Trustees' Award for Service to Community

Hossein Hakim

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 2009 Nicoletti Trustees’ Award for Service to the Community is Hossein Hakim.

Hossein Hakim joined WPI in 1984 as Assistant Professor of Electrical Engineering and is currently an Associate Professor and Associate Department Head. Throughout his many years at WPI, Hossein has been committed to serving the needs of others. He has taken a special interest in helping students and those outside the WPI community understand social and global issues, care about other people and build self-confidence in social settings. Further, he has worked closely with Abby’s House of Worcester to help raise money for abused women and children, the impoverished and the homeless.

Professor Hakim has a well-known passion for dance and initiated a wide range of activities which includes dance classes on campus, taking students to off-campus venues and dance festivals and performing with them on stage. As a result, social dance has become an integral part of student activities at WPI. While some were skeptical about engineering students socializing through dance, Hossein had a vision for dance at WPI and persevered.

His work with dance at WPI began in 2001 as the faculty advisor for the Ballroom Dance Team (BDT). Hossein made significant changes to the direction of the team and currently the BDT has classes three nights per week with weekly social dances and hosts an annual Winter Ball while participating in a number of competitions. In 2004, Professor Hakim decided to take his passion another step by organizing Latin dances to provide students with another social alternative. He organized a social salsa dance (Una Noche de Baile) as part of New Student Orientation (NSO). This was another huge success and attracted 80 students. As a follow up, Professor Hakim then
organized an Argentine Tango Performance and Dance which attracted 120 students, faculty and staff.

Recently, Hossein invited a group of talented WPI students to join him on a new venture to help the community; an organization named, “Empowerment, Hope and Celebration”. According to Professor Hakim, his work as a professor and mentor to students and others is all tied together. “The common thread among my activities has been: empowerment of individuals and organizations; bringing hope to others for a better future; and organizing dance as a way to build community and celebrate our connections.”

The three words empowerment, hope and celebration mesh perfectly with the life and career of Denise Nicoletti. Denise had a passion for empowering young people; she gave hope to children; and her life was a celebration of giving her time and talents to others.

For his years of dedication to WPI and the Worcester communities, we are proud to honor Hossein Hakim for the 2009 Denise Nicoletti Trustees’ Award for Service to the Community.