James D. Giza ’95 MS

Robert H. Goddard Award for Outstanding Professional Achievement

Jim Giza, you serve as an example of how to use a WPI education as the foundation for a career as an entrepreneur. We are pleased to recognize you today for your accomplishments.

After earning your undergraduate degree at Hartwick College, you came to WPI to earn a master’s degree in computer science. From WPI, you went on to two corporate positions and quickly learned that the typical professional path was not for you.

Instead, you took the road less traveled, working for several start-ups. Among other leadership roles, you were a project and tech lead at Interleaf, a maker of electronic publishing software; a principal software engineer at Lotus, where you worked on a high-profile Notes application related to the 1996 Olympics; and principal software engineer at AOL, where you implemented key features of AOL desktop client Data Security and Client/Server Authentication.

You joined Boston Light Software, a maker of website development software, at its inception and served as its vice president of engineering. You stayed with the company through its acquisition by Intuit, where you served as group product manager and technical evangelist.

You and several friends who had been together at Intuit, Boston Light, and Interleaf then went on to launch KAYAK, a travel price comparison website. At KAYAK you spent, in your own words, “nine years of joy,” helping grow the company from nothing to 200 employees and an IPO in July 2012. KAYAK was eventually acquired by Priceline.

Upon leaving KAYAK in 2012 you began spending significant time with WPI’s Tech Advisors Network and in a few months began serving as WPI’s Entrepreneur-in-Residence, helping our undergraduate and graduate students, faculty, and alumni turn their ideas and research into commercial ventures. Your focus has been to guide these budding entrepreneurs through the Tech Advisors Network and to connect WPI to medical staff at UMass Medical Center to create new medical products.

Besides time spent helping WPI and Worcester-area tech startups on a pro bono basis, you have been spending a growing amount of your personal—literally, hands-on—time assisting the community by applying your skills as a Kripalu Certified yoga teacher and a personal trainer, leading ten free community classes per week.

Jim Giza, your impressive record of success and service to your alma mater set an example for our students and alumni. The WPI Alumni Association is proud to present you with the Robert H. Goddard Award for Outstanding Professional Achievement.

Philip B. Ryan ’65

William R. Grogan Award for Outstanding Contributions to the Mission of WPI

Phil Ryan, few have given more to WPI in leadership, loyalty, and commitment than you. We are proud to recognize you today for all you have done to advance the mission of our noble university.

Your service to WPI began in the early 1970s and has spanned nearly every alumni volunteer role—from class agent to Reunion Committee chair, from advisory board member to leadership positions in the Alumni Association. In 1999 you were elected to the WPI Board of Trustees and you have served on every board committee and as chair of Academic Planning for several years. In May 2013 you were elected chair of the board—a role you did not keep for very long. At the start of a presidential transition, you stepped down as board chair when you agreed to serve as interim president of WPI.

From June 2013 to May 2014, you guided the WPI community with the vision and fortitude of an experienced leader and with the energy and enthusiasm of a dedicated alumnus. On campus you strove to keep the university moving forward, while also working to reassure students, faculty, staff, and alumni that the university remained on firm footings.

Known for your genuine interest in people and your affection for the WPI community, you also took seriously your responsibility to tend to the world beyond campus. You hosted alumni events in Worcester, throughout the country, and around the world. You assisted with major fundraising endeavors, representing WPI so well that some of our most illustrious alumni gladly decided to generously support their alma mater. You introduced and welcomed public officials and business leaders to WPI. You acted as official host, featured speaker, and award presenter at Alumni Weekend and Homecoming. Through it all, your wife, Judy, was always at your side representing her adopted university.

Your time as interim president and now again as board chair is the culmination of years of service and support. You and Judy are longtime members of the President’s Circle, WPI’s leadership group of annual donors, and you became Presidential Founders in 2009 in recognition of your lifetime philanthropy. You are members of the Alden Society and you support WPI students through the Philip Ryan Family Endowed Scholarship.

To this day, you credit much of your success to the long friendship and mentoring of Dean Emeritus Bill Grogan ’46, who engaged you and your classmates in discussions about the philosophy of science and engineering education, which led to the development of the WPI Plan. After the great service you performed on behalf of your alma mater, we could think of no more fitting way to recognize you than with the award that bears Dean Grogan’s name.

Phil Ryan, your commitment and passion for WPI has won the eternal respect and admiration of your fellow trustees, the administration, faculty, staff, students, and alumni—indeed the entire WPI family. You serve as a role model and exemplify the very best that WPI has to offer. In recognition of your remarkable dedication to your alma mater, the WPI Alumni Association is honored to present you with the William R. Grogan Award for Outstanding Contributions to the Mission of WPI.