Alumni Awards 2019

April 30, 2019

MSU Engineering to honor eight alumni May 4 for significant accomplishments

Eight distinguished alumni of the Michigan State University College of Engineering will be honored Saturday, May 4, during the 2019 Alumni Awards Banquet at MSU's Kellogg Hotel and Conference Center. MSU Engineering will also recognize a high school educator who has been teaching science at Grandville High School for more than 30 years and whose significant accomplishments reflect positively on MSU and the College of Engineering.

Receiving this year’s Claud R. Erickson Distinguished Alumni Award is Penny Wirsing, PE, an environmental manager at Torrance Refining Company LLC in Southern California and the 2019 president of the Society of Women Engineers (SWE). The award is the highest honor presented to an alumnus by the college. It recognizes professional accomplishment, volunteer service, and distinguished service to the college and the engineering profession.

Wirsing graduated Mason High School in 1974, and found herself a divorced mother at the age of 18. She began taking classes at Lansing Community College and received an associate’s degree in business management in 1979. She transferred to MSU and earned a bachelor’s degree in civil engineering in 1983. She later earned an MBA from the University of Washington.

She has been working in the environmental science and engineering fields for more than 30 years. In her current position, she is responsible for ensuring Torrance Refining’s compliance with local, state and federal regulations. She has worked in similar roles for Mobil and ExxonMobil.

Throughout her career, she has mentored young women within her company, in the local community, and at colleges and universities. She was one of five founding members of a networking organization formed in the early 1990s to promote the personal and professional growth of women at Mobil Corporation. She has also volunteered with a broad range of programs to encourage girls to engage in science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) activities.

She is current national president of the Society of Women Engineers, a 40,000-member professional organization
dedicated to encouraging women to achieve their full potential in careers as engineers and leaders. She has been an engaged member of SWE since she was a student at MSU, serving in numerous leadership roles.

Along with the alumni award, Wirsing will present the keynote address during the 2019 Spring Commencement for around 700 engineering undergraduates on Sunday, May 5, in the Breslin Center.

Seven other alumni will receive departmental honors and the Green Apple Teaching Award will be presented. The honorees are:

- **David Foulke**, the health, environmental and safety and training manager for Marathon Petroleum Corporation in Findlay, Ohio, will receive the Applied Engineering Sciences (AES) Distinguished Alumni Award. He has served in various roles during his 30-year career with Marathon, including assignments in project management, environmental remediation, financial analysis, environmental permitting, terminal operations and marine operations. Foulke is the lead for Marathon’s engineering recruiting efforts at MSU, serves on the College of Engineering Alumni Board and is currently vice chair of the board. He received a bachelor’s degree in AES in 1988 and an MBA from Bowling Green State University in 1995.

- **Scott Piggott**, chief executive officer of the Michigan Farm Bureau, will receive the Biosystems and Agricultural Engineering Distinguished Alumni Award. As CEO, he is responsible for planning, managing and supervising services and programs provided by Farm Bureau for its 213,000 members. Michigan Farm Bureau is the state’s largest general farm organization. He has served on more than 20 boards and committees including co-chairing the Michigan Agriculture Environmental Assurance Program and the Michigan Groundwater Conservation Advisory Council. Piggott received the 2013 Distinguished Alumni Award from the MSU Agricultural Engineering Department. He farms with his family near Fowler. He received bachelor’s (1998) and master’s degrees (2010) in biosystems engineering at MSU.

- **Kathy Fish**, chief research, development and innovation officer for Proctor & Gamble, will receive the Red Cedar Circle Award in Chemical Engineering and Materials Science. She is responsible for leading 6,700 global Research and Development (R&D) employees and managing $1.9 billion in annual R&D investments. She is a member of P&G’s Global Leadership Council, a key advisor to the CEO, and liaison to the board of director’s Innovation and Technology Committee. In 2014, Fish was elected P&G’s first female chief technology officer. Fish is the P&G sponsor for the company’s relationships with both MSU and the University of Michigan. Fish, who lives in the Cincinnati area, received a bachelor’s degree in chemical engineering in 1979.

- **Larry J. Fleis, PE**, cofounder of Fleis & VandenBrink (F&V) Engineering, Inc., will receive the Civil and Environmental Engineering Distinguished Alumni Award. Under his leadership, the company has grown from a single Grand Rapids engineering firm to include construction management and operations of water and wastewater treatment facilities, with more than 225 employees and nine offices in Michigan and Indiana. Today, he is president and chairman
of the board of the parent company and is president of affiliated companies. He has chaired the MSU CEE Engineering Advisory Board. He and his siblings established the Ed & Irene Fleis Education Fund in honor of their parents, which has awarded more than $300,000 in scholarships since 2006. He and his wife, Jackie, live in Ada. He received a bachelor’s degree in civil engineering in 1973.

- Farshad Fotouhi, dean of the College of Engineering at Wayne State University (WSU) in Detroit, will receive the Computer Science and Engineering Distinguished Alumni Award. He joined the computer science faculty at WSU in 1988, upon completion of his PhD in computer science at MSU in 1988. He served as chair of the WSU Department of Computer Science from January 2004 until being named dean in February 2011. Among his accomplishments, he oversaw the transition of the Department of Computer Science from the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences to the College of Engineering. His research interests include biomedical informatics, semantic web and multimedia systems. He has published more than 200 papers in refereed journals and conference proceedings. He received bachelor’s (1981) and master’s (1982) degrees in computer science from Western Michigan University.

- Karen Newman, is vice president of the IBM Services Division, managing the Global Honda account, will receive the John D. Ryder Electrical and Computer Engineering Alumni Award. She oversees the services work IBM provides to Honda, including infrastructure, consulting and system maintenance in Japan, the U.S., Europe, Brazil, India, and emerging markets. She is responsible for both sales and delivery of this global portfolio. Newman has been a member of the AIAG Board of Directors since 2008, and is a member of the IBM Industry Academy for the automotive industry. She currently serves on the MSU ECE Department Advisory Board. Newman, who lives in Southeast Michigan, received a bachelor’s degree in electrical engineering, with high honors, in 1982.

- Kim Smith, vice president and general manager of Boeing Fabrication, will receive the Mechanical Engineering Distinguished Alumni Award. Smith oversees the global operation of 12 manufacturing sites and more than 15,000 employees who produce components for Boeing Commercial Airplanes. She is also Boeing’s business leader for additive manufacturing, overseeing the company’s implementation strategy for 3D-printing capabilities. In 2017, she received the Army Aviation Association of America’s (AAAA) Knight of the Honorable Order of St. Michael Award. Smith serves on the MSU Mechanical Engineering Advisory Board. Smith lives in the Greater Seattle area. She received a bachelor’s degree in mechanical engineering in 1996 and an MBA at Seattle University in 2010.

The 2019 Green Apple Award will be presented to Kevin Corfixsen, who has been teaching science at Grandville High School for three decades. A graduate of Central Michigan University, he joined Grandville High in 1988 to teach
freshman physical science and biology. He has taught Honors Chemistry since 1990, and AP Chemistry since 2005. He has also been a mentor teacher at the summer AP Institute offered at Grandville High School. Corfixsen’s outreach beyond the classroom includes coaching both boys and girls basketball, and girls golf at Grandville High. He was nominated for the Green Apple Teaching Award by Samuel Daniels, a senior at MSU majoring in chemical engineering.

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