Welcome from Donna Savicki

I am Donna Savicki. Eileen Ng-Ghavidel and I will read brief citations about each of our award winners. They will remain seated until we finish reading, then will come up to receive their awards from the Dean. We ask that you hold your applause until we have finished reading each citation.

Following the presentation of our Infinite Mile Awards, I will present the Ellen J. Mandigo Awards.

I will begin.
PATRICIA EAMES (Donna)

Our first award winner today is Patricia Eames. Patty is the program coordinator for the Leaders for Global Operations program (formerly LFM). LGO is a fast paced program in which students receive two degrees in two years: either an MBA or SM in Management from Sloan and an SM degree in engineering. As LGO program coordinator, Patty serves multiple clients including the faculty for whom she schedules student reviews and makes sure course materials are prepared and available when needed, the LGO representatives from major global corporations for whom she is the point of contact for the logistics of the various reviews and management meetings, and the nearly 100 students enrolled in the program. Occasionally the requests or requirements of the clients are in conflict but Patty prioritizes and balances those requests with a positive spirit and meticulous attention to detail.

For the students, Patty handles many of the details of every day life from class registrations and internship preparations to visa applications, health and insurance problems and arranging for the production of around 50 posters for the LGO poster session each year. She coordinates student trips to local plants, and LGO leadership activities such as the annual Outward Bound experience for the new class in June. One writer tells us that in his 35 years at MIT, Patty is the most effective administrative assistant he has ever supervised and the students are profuse in their praise. One student writes, Patty doesn’t just convey instructions to the 100 students under her care, she motivates them. She goes out of her way to help with large and small things. She is deeply interested in every aspect of the program and this allows her to perform at the highest level the enormous range of tasks assigned to her. She is incredibly responsive to each person’s needs but at the same time, she is always looking for systematic solutions to improve the program. Every year, LGO does exit interviews with its student and to a person, the students point to Patty as the common denominator in how well the program is run. Student after student tells us that Patty is the go-to person, even acknowledging that many of them wouldn’t graduate without her help. Despite her many responsibilities, she is always willing to help a student with any problem, and she does all of this with a smile never leaving her face.

Patty, we are grateful for your remarkable service. It is a pleasure to present you today with a School of Engineering Infinite Mile Award for Excellence. Congratulations.
PATTY GLIDDEN (Eileen)

Over the past six years Patricia Glidden has served as Graduate Admissions Coordinator for the Department of Civil & Environmental Engineering. In this role, Patty is key in one of the most hectic and critical periods for an academic department. This year CEE’s graduate applications were up 20% higher over the year before with approximately 500 applications received for a dozen different programs. As some of you may know, the applications process is varied meaning while many applications are being submitted electronically; there are still some applications that are submitted the old fashion way via hard copy and snail mail. The variety in the applications process requires an organized, problem-solving, and detail oriented administrator and there is no doubt that Patty has successfully mastered this aspect of the admissions process. The challenge of making sure stray transcripts and letters of recommendations are matched with application folders going out to approximately 40 faculty reviewers can be a daunting task. However, Patty manages to keep the process moving all the while maintaining a relaxed and confident attitude.

The growth of the applicant pool was only one of the challenges that Patty faced this year. A person who leads the MEng program was in Singapore for much of the admissions season. In order to ensure a smooth and seamless review process, Patty devised an efficient and electronic solution so that 130 applications could be reviewed from across the globe. Her quick thinking and adaptability to new software resulted in an online application site that not only made the review possible but reduced delivery time for applications to the admissions committee.

On top of all of this, Patty doesn’t hesitate to go above and beyond her duties by volunteering as a freshman advisor, participating in the hooding ceremony, serving on the committee for the CONVERGE Program (which is an Institute-wide campus preview weekend program for prospective students from underrepresented groups). A quotation from a nominator provides a wonderful perspective of Patty. It states “Her enormous energy and enthusiasm never fail to leave a positive impression and even promote more positive attitudes in those working with her (including me). Quite simply, Patty not only maintains a superior work ethic and attitude, but promotes an equal level of excellence in her colleagues.” Patty it is with enthusiasm that we award you with a SoE Infinite Mile Award for Excellence.
DONNA KAUFMAN (Donna)

Donna Kaufman is the administrative assistant to the head of the Department of Electrical Engineering and Computer Science, a department with over 120 faculty members – thus, no small task, for Donna or her boss. Donna serves as an essential interface between the EECS administration and its constituencies as well as other MIT administrative offices, including the SoE Dean’s Office and I am pleased to count myself among Donna’s admirers.

Donna is often the first person visitors to EECS Headquarters encounter and she projects a professional, courteous and efficient image that serves the department well. As the interface between the department heads’ office and the faculty she is responsive, efficient, proactive and creative. She also serves as the coordinator of communications between the department head and EECS’s deep alumni pools – handling requests, coordinating stewardship material and generally serving as a contact point for alumni. The department head attributes to Donna EECS’s well-deserved reputation for always meeting deadlines, delivering material in appropriate form, responding to last minute requests promptly, and generally providing efficient and effective service. As you will hear later, Donna is one of several pillars upon whom the Department’s reputation in this regard rests. We are unquestionably fortunate that this, our largest department, is so well supported.

Donna is a perfectionist, and it shows in everything she does from promotion case preparation, to handling travel arrangements, scheduling complex meetings, organizing major social events for this very large department, and serving as course secretary for classes with as many as 350+ students at a time.

Speaking for myself, I have attended EECS events that Donna organized and I am always astonished by her ability to attend so carefully to innumerable details with such apparent ease. As for promotion cases, anyone who has had to prepare a case knows how challenging, time-consuming and often stressful the task can be. Last year, Donna was responsible for eight tenure cases. She is one of a handful of local experts with whom I consult on case format. Like her boss, I rely heavily on her keen interest in the task at hand, her perfectionism and her good judgment. I also treasure her always friendly manner and her wonderful sense of humor.

Donna does her job with incredible professionalism, efficiency and accuracy. She does not seek recognition for her performance, but takes quiet pride in getting the job done.

It is with pleasure and gratitude, Donna, that we present you today with a School of Engineering Infinite Mile Award for Excellence.
THOMAS MCKRELL  (Eileen)

Serving as a Research Scientist in the Department of Nuclear Science and Engineering, Dr. Thomas McKrell has made a significant impact on students and faculty alike. Thomas began his appointment in 2006 and over his brief tenure has demonstrated his technical expertise, commitment to research and enthusiasm for educating students. Over these four years, Thomas single-handedly transformed the Thermal Hydraulics Lab into a multi-use space. Thomas understood the need to bring a hands-on approach to student experiments and convinced the faculty of the merits. Now the revitalized space is a world-class lab with state-of-the-art equipment and instrumentation with as many as eight different experiments running at the same time. As the department’s safety coordinator, he ensures that all of these experiments are running safely and as one can imagine this takes a tremendous amount of attention to detail and masterful coordination. Thomas not only brings his technical expertise to the lab but an unbound enthusiasm for his work.

Nominators shared with us Thomas’ unparallel commitment to students. We heard time and again how he has shown tremendous drive and willingness to guide students on their projects so that they are successful and are able to meet project milestones. He consistently works late to ensure that he is able to meet with all students on a one-to-one basis. Additionally, he gives his home and cell numbers to students so that they may reach him. He is always happy to take the time to answer questions despite being on vacation or while home sick. Thomas does all of this while also balancing a full family life.

Thomas’ mentorship of students is a facet that must be noted as well. He has created a friendly, fun, and exciting lab environment that has helped inspire students to excel. A student nominator writes: “He makes you feel as if you are the most important student doing the most important research.” Another nominator shared: “Being a foreign student, it took me a while before becoming fully integrated with MIT. Dr. McKrell helped me immensely during my first months here and also provided me a cultural point of view, introducing me to many relevant aspects of the American culture and habits. He cared about me first as a person and then as a student. And this is something I will never forget.”

Thomas you are an inspiration and it is an honor to recognize you for your hard work, dedication to the students and commitment to excellence. Congratulations on being a School of Engineering Infinite Mile Award winner.
ELIZABETH MILNES (Donna)

Elizabeth Milnes is the academic administrator for the Engineering Systems Division (ESD), our newest and in some ways our most complex academic unit. In this role, Beth coordinates admissions, course planning and evaluation, and mentoring and feedback to the current graduate students in ESD. She is also responsible for overall coordination of common issues for the over 400 students across multiple graduate programs including the ESD PhD and SM programs, the Technology and Policy Program, Leaders for Global Operations, System Design and Management and the Masters in Logistics program.

Beth earns high praise from the ESD faculty. One says that she is the most effective academic administrator he has ever worked with during his long career at MIT. It is no exaggeration, another faculty member tells us, to say that Beth does the work of three people. Her door is always open for students, faculty or staff members seeking her help. And every year the results of her work get better. Yet another faculty member writes, Beth is incredibly dedicated, working long hours and doing more than is required to assist in the success of the ESD students. She works independently, always thinking of ways to improve things for the students.

The students are also effusive in their praise for Beth, citing her dedication, her initiative and her leadership. Her knowledge of the way things work at MIT and her willingness to help have made her the go-to person for students enrolled in the ESD graduate program, whatever their questions might be. One student tells us, “whether my requests are simple, or complicated, personal or on behalf of ESD, she has never failed to come through, always making me feel like she’s happy to help.” Beth is effective, efficient and enthusiastic about finding solutions to all kinds of problems. Yet another student tells us that Beth is the epitome of commitment. She has actively contributed and improved aspects of the program that lie far outside her official responsibilities. “Throughout the lifecycle of a PhD student, from orientation to class selection to quals to defense to graduation, Beth is there to calmly advise and inform and guide. She has been an indispensable guide in our time as students. Quite simply, we have no idea where we would be without Beth.”

In my own interactions with Beth, I have always been impressed by her efficiency and her deep understanding of ESD’s academic programs. Beth, on behalf of ESD and the School, we are very pleased to present you today with a School of Engineering Infinite Mile Award for Excellence.
DAVID SCHULTZ (Eileen)

As a member of the System Design and Management (SDM) program, David Schultz is responsible for providing administrative support to the program. His primary responsibilities include handling and overseeing all the logistics of SDM events; maintaining the master calendar and coordinating schedules with participating faculty; serving as a key point of contact for all networking activities throughout MIT and in the Boston/Cambridge area; ensuring all audio/visual equipment needs are met, scheduling rooms and coordinating all catering activities.

As some of you may know, SDM students start together as a cohort in January of each year. Some refer to this period as SDM boot camp because during this four week period, students complete three courses, a number of seminars, three design challenges and several team-building exercises. The year’s class size of 52 included many students who have been out of an academic setting for a decade or more. The schedule is intense and 12 – 18 hour days are typical. Dave’s role is crucial since he single-handedly manages all of the logistics and is responsible for making sure the students and faculty have all of their needs met. This includes making sure there are materials for the design challenges, a welcoming environment, and of course food and drink for hungry teams.

Nominators tell us that Dave works tirelessly to make sure the SDM boot camp is a success and will put in hours and effort beyond the typical work day. If supplies are needed for a project or if a student has a special food request, Dave will go out to the local hardware or grocery store after hours and bring them to the office himself, and often on the train. Nominators also told us that Dave’s positive and pro-active attitude infuses the SDM program and makes it a better place to work and grow. Many believe that he does not have ‘no’ or ‘I can’t’ in his vocabulary. Not only is Dave willing to take on new challenges, he is a fine contributor in bringing ideas to improve or eliminate the logistical challenges of coordinating events.

A nominator sums it up by stating “Dave Schultz is one of those people who put a face to MIT and the SDM program that is always welcoming and trusted. He personifies the level of service and caring that turns 52 strangers from diverse backgrounds into SDM family members, and prepares them for the heavy course loads they will face as they continue the program. His work truly personifies the kind of excellence that we hope everyone who works at MIT will achieve. “Dave, we couldn’t agree more and it is our pleasure to recognize your wonderful contributions with this School of Engineering Infinite Mile Award for Excellence.
KAREN SHIRER (Eileen)

Karen Shirer is the Assistant Director for Administration in the Computer Science and Artificial Intelligence Laboratory (CSAIL). In this role, she has the administrative oversight of more than 800 employees and is responsible for the financial management of research volume totaling $40M. Since her appointment in 2004, Karen has taken a pro-active and analytical approach at her work. In this period of time, she re-organized the entire headquarters operations to gain efficiencies, provide career growth opportunities, and maximize the skills of the staff. Many have commented on CSAIL’s HQs seamless operations. Her attention to detail, willingness to listen, coupled with her can-do attitude and pro-active problem solving skills make Karen a tremendous asset. A nominator writes: “She knows how to get things done and is always ready to help solve problems. She has made a big difference in my work, often lending a hand beyond the call of duty. She has been swift to take care of routine issues and has been especially resourceful in the face of unusual situations. When I struggle with deadlines or interpreting the requirements of proposals, Karen is always there to explain even if it is at 10pm on a Saturday night or on Thanksgiving.”

A notable facet of Karen’s abilities lies in her mentorship and commitment to her staff. The headquarters operation is large but her commitment to seeing each and every member succeed is personalized and sincere. She often encourages them to take courses that will enhance their performance or provide additional career opportunities. Their success is a high priority for Karen and she always makes time for the staff no matter how hectic the schedule may be.

Some of the activities she is involved with go beyond those of a typical Assistant Director role. For example, Karen played an important role in the formation of the CSAIL Industry Affiliates Program and she used her negotiations skills to secure major agreements between the lab and Nokia and Northrop Grumman in record time. Despite the heavy demands of her position in CSAIL, Karen generously lends her expertise to Institute committees as well.

A faculty nominator states: “I have had the privilege of working with some of the best Assistant Directors and AOs. I can say without qualification that Karen is the best that I have worked with. CSAIL and I fortunate to have her in our lab.”

Karen for your tireless dedication and commitment to excellence, we award you this SoE Infinite Mile Award of Excellence.
KATHRYN SIMONS  (Donna)

Kathryn Simons is the administrative assistant to two very busy research groups in the Department of Materials Science and Engineering. According to Kathy’s faculty supervisors, “saying that (their) productivity and effectiveness, and that of their groups, have increased tremendously since Kathy arrived, captures only the most trivial aspects of her work.” She is truly dedicated and puts all her considerable passion and ingenuity into her work. Despite a heavy work load (or perhaps because of it), she is always keen to experiment with different and potentially more effective ways to perform her tasks – whether it involves organizing a trip to a conference for the entire group, coordinating the acquisition of a complex piece of equipment, or managing the faculty’s complex schedules. It is amazing how she keeps it all going. It is clear that for Kathy it is not just a job, but that she is an integral part of the group and she shares their passion for energy research.

Kathy pays particular and much appreciated attention to the needs of newly arrived students. She helps them cope with what for some is a novel and surprising environment. As a result, students keep in touch with her even long after they have left MIT – with updates on their jobs, families, and new arrivals. When former students come by MIT, they always stop by Kathy’s office.

Kathy’s faculty supervisors tell us that when the pressures of work cause tension and stress in those around her, Kathy senses the situation and offers her help. She is unflappable and always composed and quite simply, a pleasure to have around. On more relaxed days, drawing on her wonderful sense of humor, she will regale the group with stories of her eternal car breakdowns.

Kathy epitomizes our Infinite Mile Award winners. She performs her assigned tasks with uncommon skill, efficiency and dedication. She strives to improve the way things are done and is the first to offer a friendly hand to a newcomer or anyone else who needs help.

Thank you Kathy for all you do. We are very pleased to present you with a School of Engineering Infinite Mile Award for Excellence.
RON WIKEN (Eileen)

With over 29 years of service, Ron Wiken is our sole recipient this year of an Infinite Mile Award for Sustained Excellence. Ron is a Research Specialist in the Computer Science and Artificial Intelligence Laboratory (CSAIL) where he is responsible for the machine shop but Ron does more than run the machine shop; he is constantly working with students and faculty to help them achieve their research goals. In the nominating materials, we learned about how Ron distinguishes himself as “one of the most reliable contributors to the well-being of our community. He is always available for consultation on design issues. He is a careful teacher of new community members.”

A nominator writes that “In my research, we needed to build a small wind tunnel in order to conduct a set of flow visualizations on free-flying aircraft that would be impossible in existing wind tunnels on campus. Without giving it a second thought, Ron immediately took a trip with us to Home Depot, picked up all of the required supplies, and then framed-out and built us a complete wind tunnel enclosure. On another project, he ended up taking one of the terrain boards that we used for our walking robot project home and machining it in his kitchen so that we could test the robot on different terrain.” We are told that Ron will regularly spend personal time in his home workshop working on projects for CSAIL.

Ron’s reputation for being a skilled craftsman and clever designer result in colleagues across the campus contacting him for advice or assistance. In fact, when EECS needed to have a kiosk built for their entrance hallway, it was Ron who was called to help and without any hesitation, he designed and created a beautiful wooden showpiece. In recent years, Ron has been periodically called on by EECS for special projects and has always been willing to help whether it involved installing historic memorabilia or assisting in the office set up of colleague.

A nominator provides this perspective on Ron: “CSAIL students have made many of the most unique and beautiful robots in the world and many of them are featured in the MIT Museum. You can be sure that Ron has had a hand in almost every one of these. Ron is an absolute gem of a person and delightful to have as part of our lab and the MIT community. He is a quiet and unassuming person, and would never blow his own horn, so let us do it for him.” Indeed, Ron you are exceptional and we are thrilled to be presenting you with an Infinite Mile Award for Sustained Excellence.
MTL COMPUTER TEAM  (Eileen)

This year our single team award goes to the Microsystems Technology Laboratory. Tom Lohman, Bill Malone, and Mike Hobbs are the dedicated individuals that make up the MTL computer team. Tom, Bill, and Mike work collaboratively to satisfy the computational needs of the MTL community. As we understand, this is a large job that includes maintaining and upgrading the computation and network infrastructure of the building; installing, patching, debugging and decommissioning servers and personal computers, and attending to the many cries for help from all corners of the community for all kinds of problems. Tom, Bill and Mike attend to all these requests with patience and with unmatched technical expertise.

Nominators shared with us their compelling stories of the team’s responsiveness, professionalism, and flexibility. Their technical expertise in making sure users have minimal down time and their ability to recover files quickly is remarkable. We learned from a student of the team’s outstanding performance when his laptop got a black screen. The team was able to recover the lost data and because a new hard drive was needed, they carved out time to not only procure a new hard but to have his machine re-configured and ready for use within 24 hours of the black screen incident.

What sets this team apart is their commitment and dedication to providing superior customer service. The selection committee was provided evidence of their hard work via an email trail which began on Christmas Eve at 10:40pm from a student who was having problems logging into machines. As it turns out, a power failure had taken down the building’s server. There were a half of dozen email exchanges between the student and the team. Ultimately, the problem was resolved at 1:00am on Christmas Day. In addition to resolving this problem, the team was able to remotely activate a back-up server so that users would have continuous service until the faulty building server could be fixed.

The MTL community is truly fortunate to have this wonderful team that ensures smooth computing operations. They are knowledgeable, talented, and, when it counts most, they are remarkably resourceful. Tom, Bill, and Mike in recognition of your extraordinary contributions to MTL and the School, it is our pleasure to present you with an Infinite Mile Award for team excellence.
Ellen J. Mandigo Award for Outstanding Service

This is the second year we have presented the Ellen J. Mandigo Award for Outstanding Service, made possible by an unrestricted bequest from Ellen Mandigo.

Ellen was a secretary and later an administrative assistant at MIT for almost 50 years, from 1942 until her retirement in 1991. She was the "secretary" to Professor Manson Benedict, who in 1958 became the first head of the newly created Department of Nuclear Engineering. In 1971 Ellen moved to Aero/Astro where she served as the administrative assistant to the Department Head.

The Ellen J. Mandigo Award for Outstanding Service, which we have created in Ellen’s honor, is given to members of the School’s staff who have demonstrated over an extended period of time, the qualities Ellen valued and possessed in abundance, including intelligence, skill, hard work and dedication to MIT.

It is a particular pleasure for me to present the Ellen J. Mandigo awards, because not only did I have the unique pleasure of working with Ellen over three decades ago, but I have known this year’s recipients for almost as long. Like me, both of our Award winners today have spent their entire MIT careers in the School of Engineering, which I think shows infinite good taste and good sense.
Our first recipient is Agnes Chow. Agnes started at MIT in 1984 as fiscal officer in the Laboratory for Computer Science (LCS). In 1987, she moved to the Center for Technology, Policy and Industrial Development as Administrative Officer. In 1998, Agnes rejoined the computer scientists as the Administrative Officer for the Artificial Intelligence Laboratory, which merged with LCS to form CSAIL. Agnes was a member of CSAIL until 2004 when she was lured to EECS Headquarters and where she has served as the Administrative Officer for MIT’s largest academic department ever since.

Is there anyone in this room who does not know Agnes or know of her? Agnes is, quite simply, a gem. She is described by one letter writer as “extraordinary” and by another as an “indispensable part of the EECS engine” (this is MIT, after all). Her capacity for hard work is unsurpassed. One faculty member writes, “though I was just one of about a hundred PI’s in CSAIL, and am just one of more than a hundred faculty in EECS, Agnes has managed to give me ample individual attention. I can only imagine the extraordinary amount of time and care she puts in to make all of the faculty in her charge feel this way.” Another faculty member reports receiving emails from Agnes while she was on vacation, as she was cruising down the Nile River. We are told that her husband has frequently threatened to take away her computer on vacations – thus far, without success. Another faculty member writes, “your problem instantly becomes Agnes’ problem and she will deal with it with all she’s got” and Agnes’s resources are impressive. While she is absolutely amazing at details, she also has a deep understanding of the department. She is a trusted and essential advisor to many senior members of the EECS faculty. Besides her encyclopedic knowledge of MIT policies and procedures, she is a true source of wisdom about finances, personnel, leadership, vision and governance.

Agnes is a remarkable leader and has successfully mentored at least two individuals who have gone on to serve with distinction as Administrative Officers for major units within the School of Engineering. Agnes’ leadership extends to dealing with complex personnel issues. With her low-key demeanor and thoughtful observations she has been essential in dealing with any number of potentially difficult issues. Not only is she good at listening and finding impartial solutions to problems, but throughout the process she treats everyone with respect and kindness and the fact that she cares deeply for everyone around her permeates the environment.

Agnes, the Department, the School, and indeed the Institute are truly blessed to have you among us. It is with great pleasure and pride that we present you today with the Ellen J. Mandigo Award for Outstanding Service.
Leslie Regan

Our next award winner is Leslie Regan, another amazing member of the MIT community. Leslie joined MIT in 1974 as a senior secretary in Mechanical Engineering. She moved to ME Headquarters in 1982 and became the Department’s Graduate Administrator in 1986, an inspired choice on the Department’s part and one from which hundreds, if not thousands of Mechanical Engineering graduate students have benefitted.

One of the many Graduate Officers Leslie has worked with, echoed sentiments we heard over and over again in the many letters we received in support of Leslie’s nomination. He wrote that he was often “awed” by Leslie’s dedication to the ME graduate students. And I quote, “for years (Leslie) has been the best friend that an ME graduate student could have, . . . (she) works tirelessly every day of the week (all seven) and often into the night to make sure (the graduate students) are properly supported and looked after during their time here. From the moment they are admitted until they graduate she has an uncanny ability to know and follow every one of (the Department’s more than 400 graduate) students, and to know how they are faring in the high pressure world of MIT. . . . she will go out of her way to seek out students who are struggling, work doggedly to rectify difficult situations, and do it all with a smile and a quick wit. . . . many of our students leave MIT knowing only one or two faculty well, but they all leave knowing Leslie and she them.”

Another faculty member wrote that he “. . . was absolutely stunned to see the amount of energy, thought, and goodwill Leslie carries into her job. “ Leslie never hesitates to go the extra mile. A typical example occurred during ME’s Open House this year when some students had difficulty getting here from Logan Airport because of the heavy rains. Leslie did not hesitate to drive out to the airport, pick up the students and help them find suitable accommodations.

A former student who is now on the faculty wrote, “when I enrolled as a graduate student . . . I was immediately struck by how knowledgeable, compassionate and willing to help (Leslie) was. For young students just joining the department, she is an invaluable resource.” And from another student, “Leslie is our department’s best spokesperson . . . (she) works tirelessly to ensure that our experiences at MIT are positive.”

Remarkably, Leslie is able to provide students with this amazing level of personal attention while also keeping the ME Graduate Office running smoothly. We are told, indeed I know, that she runs a high-octane graduate office. Leslie’s knowledge of the MIT system is deep and broad and she shares it unhesitatingly with all comers, as I can personally attest.
Leslie, the selection committee could not agree more with the faculty member who wrote that you embody the spirit of generosity, humanity and service that is so crucial to the MIT culture. In recognition of your remarkable service, we are very pleased to be able to present you with the Ellen J. Mandigo Award for Outstanding Service. Thank you!