May 2013 Infinite Mile Awards
Remarks for the School of Engineering Infinite Mile Awards Celebration May 2013

Cindy Barnhart

It is my pleasure to welcome you to the School’s Thirteenth Annual Infinite Mile Awards Celebration. Today we will present Infinite Mile Awards to six individuals. We will also present two Ellen J. Mandigo Awards for Outstanding Service.

Our thanks to the SoE department heads and center and laboratory directors for their help in coordinating the nomination process, and to those of you who took the time to nominate your coworkers and colleagues. Your thoughtful contributions make this celebration possible.

I would like to recognize and thank Tia Giurleo, Robin Palazzolo and Katie Zorzos for their work in organizing this celebration.

Finally, my thanks to all of you for taking the time to share in this wonderful event. I look forward to talking with you over refreshments after the awards have been presented.
Francis Doughty

Two years ago, when the EECS leadership turned over, there was a new head, two new associate heads, and two new administrative assistants. Only one member of the former team remained, Francis Doughty, and having been through quite a few transitions myself, I know what it’s like.

Francis truly stepped up. EECS is a large and complex unit. The EECS curriculum and the research of the EECS faculty are world-renowned. What is perhaps less well known is that it is also an incredibly well run department and with Francis’ help, the new team maintained that tradition of excellence. Although it was not part of his job description and he had not previously been involved in the preparation of promotion and tenure cases, Francis took a crash course from the former department head’s administrative assistant and rose to the occasion – the occasion that year being ten promotion cases – a load that few departments ever see. I work with the department heads’ administrative assistants on promotion and tenure cases, and I was immediately impressed by how quickly Francis came up to speed, by the quality of his work and his calm demeanor despite the heavy load and enormous responsibility he’d been given.

Francis’ initiative coupled with his attention to detail, careful organization and above all, his genuine concern that the job be done right were essential to the department as it successfully negotiated the change in department heads and their assistants.

This year, the associate head that Francis supports felt perfectly comfortable delegating to Francis much of the work associated with preparing a (successful) MacVicar nomination for an EECS faculty member. While the credit goes to the faculty award winner, the selection committee was also impressed by the aspects of the nomination package that were Francis’ responsibility.

Also this year, Francis brought his excellent skills to bear in supporting the associate head as chair of the Computer Science faculty search. Despite the much higher than usual workload, Francis’s work was flawless.

Francis’ nominator says, “Francis has truly gone the extra mile for our department. In these past two years, he has steadied our ship during our
transition of both faculty leaders and their administrative assistants, and made extraordinary contributions to faculty promotions, award nominations, and faculty search. This is the perfect year for him to win this award.” And the School’s IMA selection committee agrees.

Francis is also a musician. The Boston Herald said and I quote, “guitarist Francis Doughty is one of the best-kept secrets in town.” It seems this 34-year veteran of MIT has been one of the best-kept secrets at MIT as well. It is a great pleasure for us to bring Francis into the limelight he so richly deserves by presenting him today with a School of Engineering Infinite Mile Award for Excellence. Congratulations, Francis.
Chevalley Duhart

I’m delighted to present Chevalley Duhart with an Infinite Mile Award for excellence. Chevalley began at MIT in the Department of Mechanical Engineering as a temp and was then hired as an employee in March 2008. She currently supports three faculty members, is the main administrative contact for the capstone design class 2.009, as well as 2.00b (toy product design), 2.744 (product design), which are all intensive project-based classes that serve approximately 300 students each year. She is called “an ambassador for the Design Group”. A nominator writes: “Chevalley is the source of calm among the members of the 4th floor Design Group…Because she has so often ‘paid forward’ a helping hand to the others on the staff, she has fostered a trusting relationship among the members that leads them to routinely step in for one another…I have not before known of a time when the staff across an entire floor worked so well together for the benefit of the faculty and students”.

Chevalley manages a large number of logistical items for the student courses, ranging from food for events and meetings to managing budgets and reimbursement for student purchases – a huge job which includes processing receipts for 150 students making multiple purchases in any given week. The 2.009 course has reviews roughly every three weeks throughout the term; this means that there are approximately 30 guests or outside design professionals that participate in these reviews and Chevalley is always quick to attend to their needs. By the time grade meetings are complete, review night typically ends between 11PM and midnight and she happily helps out through the process, regularly offering to come in on weekends to lend a hand. Chevalley has been an integral player developing the 2.009 final presentations into a premier MIT event, filling Kresge auditorium each year with roughly 1200 guests for a “theatrical production that she coordinates seamlessly”.

Students refer to Chevalley as the “glue that keeps it all together…[she] is a support arm for students when they need it the most.” Another student tells us “I knew I could always drop into her office and any time and she’d greet me with a smile and was always very willing to help me out…[she] definitely worked above and beyond, and her hard work behind the scenes helped make the 2.009 experience a rewarding one”.

A nominator shares his appreciation saying “Chevalley is committed to our teaching mission and is a valuable, dedicated resource and is extremely responsible in her position. She does not see what she does as just a job.” Another nominator echo’s these sentiments saying “she is one of the ‘gems’ in Mechanical engineering and in the school of Engineering, and she does all the above and much more with a graciousness and charm that many envy”.

Thank you, Chevalley, for your unwavering support and dedication. It’s my honor to present you with an Infinite Mile award for Excellence.
The nominations for Carolyn Jundzilo-Comer are as pleasing to the spirit as her lovely paintings are to the eye. Carolyn, a talented and successful painter is also described as a bright, gifted and delightful woman. She joined the Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering in 1977 and over the years has shown exemplary commitment along with consistently superior work performance. Carolyn is at ease with whomever she meets and also with herself; never intruding but always there to help and offer her services. Carolyn’s many admirers wax poet about the wonderful influence she has on their lives. Her faculty supervisor of 22 years says that nothing he has done in education, service or research could have been done without her. And she is equally devoted to the students who find in her a trusted and understanding confidante. She shares their joys in good times and supports them and consoles them when things do not go well. An alum writes, “I miss MIT every day, but Carolyn gifted me her painting of Building 1, so it feels like I am still walking in Killian Court, about to go to my office . . . . Whenever I am in Boston or MIT, I always visit Carolyn. . . . (she) has a special place in my heart.”

Other students describe Carolyn, as

“always there with her beautiful smile wishing you a happy day, always there asking about how things are going, always there sharing your special occasions, the first wishing you a happy birthday. With her lovable personality making (you) always feel that (you are) among a family that loves (you) and truly cares.”

“Carolyn is a warm, lively and refreshing presence on the third floor (of Building 1). Every time I pop into her office with a question, she’ll respond not only with an answer, but with a witty joke or a funny story. In the often rushed and chaotic days of grad school, Carolyn provides a welcome respite from the stress.”

“Carolyn is not only a tireless and hard-working assistant, she is also a friend who cares about everyone in the CEE department, especially the students. She is always available when (we) need some material to finish a presentation or prepare a report, even if it means staying until later in her
office. Above all, she is a wonderful human being with a sweet and warm heart!”

“Carolyn is more than just an excellent secretary, she is an amazing person.”

“She is willing to help you all the time if she can.”

“She is sunny and fun, that is noticeable even from her rainbow colored sox (sic).”

Carolyn, it is with joy and gratitude that we present you with a School of Engineering Infinite Mile Award for Excellence.
Hannah Merrick

I am pleased to present Hannah Merrick with an Infinite Mile Award for Excellence. Hannah began as an Administrative Assistant to the center for Emergent Behaviors of Integrated Cellular Systems (EBICS) in the Department of Biological Engineering in May of 2011 and she quickly became a key member of the organization, easily fulfilling all position requirements and beyond.

EBICS is a large center, including about 130 faculty, postdocs and students across 11 institutions with a small administrative staff. Hannah assists with virtually every aspect of the Center from events planning and scheduling to record keeping, accounts reconciliation, and developing budgets; from designing flyers and announcements to analyzing data and generating charts and tables; from researching project management software to navigating the National Science Foundation (NSF) bureaucracy.

Faculty say Hannah is “not satisfied with simply running an efficient, well-organized operation…[her] willingness to take on responsibilities outside of her defined job description and her willingness to learn new skills to help the Center distinguishes her as an employee who consistently goes beyond expectations.” One example of this was when the Center did not have the funds to hire a full-time web developer; Hannah took matters into her own hands. “Through online tutorials and readings she learned to use the back end of our web platform and was able to build the necessary portions of the site herself, allowing the Center to meet [their] critical reporting deadline[s]”.

As if that’s not enough, Hannah gracefully juggled all administrative responsibilities for the Center during a month-long gap while the Center was between managers. During the transition between managers was the annual NSF Site Visit review of the Center where she organized all efforts for this high-stakes, three-day, 50-person event involving multiple NSF offices and nearly all Center partner organizations. While this job is normally handled by two staff members, Hannah took on the 13 presentations, a poster session, a videoconference meeting with senior university administrators across three time zones, and multiple small group events held simultaneously at separate locations. In addition, she coordinated with multiple hotels, oversaw catering to accommodate various dietary restrictions, managed internet
conductivity and other IT issues during this critical site visit with grace and ease.

We are told that Hannah’s initiative is impressive as evidenced by the considerable time and effort she put into understanding the research projects. Consequently even though she had limited training in science, she was able to assist in scientific writing and editing while managing the research communication forum. Faculty call Hannah’s achievement this year “nothing short of remarkable”.

Hannah, I’m thrilled to present you with an Infinite Mile Award for excellence for your extraordinary skills and willingness to go above and beyond.
Angelita Mireles began as the Academic Administrator of the Department of Materials Science & Engineering (DMSE) in 2006. In her seven years there, faculty describe her as “a high-energy, high-performing employee” and say she “has become the cultural centerpiece of DMSE; the person that our students, staff, and faculty all think of first as defining the DMSE community.”

A nominator describes Angelita as “indispensable as the leader of our Student Services Organization.” In her role, Angelita oversees both graduate and undergraduate programs, working with major departmental and institute committees, her counterparts in other departments, faculty, and the instructional staff, as well as the students themselves, often forming the critical communication channel between all these groups. Her job requires an intense focus on detail as well as an overarching strategic understanding of the department's educational goals.

A faculty member who served as Department Head and chair of the graduate program says, “Angelita is absolutely devoted to the Department and its students. She works on their behalf 24/7, over a range of activities that include insightful contributions to policy discussions among faculty, to counseling of students with personal problems. She handles an impossible work load (especially during Admissions season) with professionalism, intelligence, and good humor”.

The students eagerly echo the faculty’s sentiments about Angelita noting “Angelita is one of the few people on campus who leads with a quiet strength. She is present at the start of most, if not all, undergraduate events which range from study breaks and faculty luncheons, to town hall meetings and career development panels to make sure that everything is set to run smoothly. She is always there to lend us a shoulder to complain on when lab week is getting too stressful, and reminds us that at the end of the day everything is going to be okay.” Another student tells us, “Angelita is an incredible resource to the members of the DMSE community. I don't think there is a problem I cannot go to her with...she puts in extra hours in the evenings and weekends to make sure everything is taken care of - She really is the go-to person for all of us [students] and I think we all feel like we couldn't cope if she weren't around to help us out.”
We are told that Angelita is sought out by students and faculty alike because of her knowledge of how the Institute and department function. Her administrative know-how is always accompanied by a warm and caring attitude. A nominator calls her “a critical lifeline” for students, staff, and faculty.

Angelita, your dedication and hard work are legendary in DMSE, I’m honored to present you with your Infinite Mile Award for Excellence.
Gwen Wilcox

I’m thrilled to present Gwen Wilcox with an Infinite Mile Award. Gwen is an Administrative Assistant in the Department of Chemical Engineering where she has worked for more than 10 years. She helps support Professors Karen Gleason, William Green, and Kristala Prather. Her hard work is evident in the various ChemE Awards she has accrued over the years: she was awarded the Outstanding Employee for the academic years 2003-2004, 2005-2006, and 2011-2012, as well as a SoE Infinite Mile Award winner in 2006.

Gwen has consistently performed at a high level. However, in the past couple of years, she has exceeded even her own high standards for outstanding service to MIT and the department.

In the summer of 2011, ChemE was granted the 5th floor of buildings E17 and E18 to be renovated for 4 faculty. While initially Gwen was only assigned to support one faculty, within a couple of months of the project’s initiation, it became clear that Gwen was providing an equally high-level of support to each of the four faculty that were designated to be moved. She began collecting plans for the lab and office spaces, meeting with each faculty member to discuss needed changes and points of design conflict, compiling and communicating these changes to the architect and facilities teams. She arranged meetings with audio visual to discuss conference room needs, communicated the need for and responsibilities of student representatives from each research group to facilitate transfer of information, and began to collect equipment inventories from each lab. She took care of scheduling meetings with each faculty member to select furnishings and personally accompanied each one to Tech Square to make the selections. For a period of about 9 months, Gwen woke at 5 AM on Thursday mornings in order to arrive on campus for the early morning renovation meetings. When it was time to finally move, she gave up her own vacation plans between Christmas and New Year’s Eve to be on campus in order to cover headquarters and to make sure all aspects related to the move went as smoothly as possible.

Gwen’s attention to detail and reliability makes everything better for everyone around her, even if she is not directly responsible for their administrative needs. A faculty nominator notes “Gwen does what she does
not for accolades, recognition, or rewards, but simply because if she knows she can make something – ANYTHING – better for the people around her, she does it, even though this frequently causes her to take on substantially more work” and her selfless behavior has “become legendary in the department”.

Gwen, it is a great honor and an even greater pleasure for us to present you with this Infinite Mile Award for your extraordinary service.
Ellen J. Mandigo Award

As always, it is great pleasure for me to present the Ellen J. Mandigo Awards for Outstanding Service, which are funded by a bequest from Ellen Mandigo, a long time member of the School of Engineering.
JoAnn Sorrento

Our first Ellen J. Mandigo award winner today is JoAnn Sorrento, administrative assistant to the head of the Department of Biological Engineering. JoAnn has been at MIT since 1975 and has been with BE since it’s founding in 1998. JoAnn will be retiring soon, after 38 years of remarkable service to MIT, and she will be sorely missed.

JoAnn has won the confidence, the respect and the friendship of students, postdocs, fellow AAs, at least one assistant dean, and, of course, BE faculty members. Her presence and efforts are described as indispensable to BE headquarters. She has eased the difficult transition to MIT for students, staff and faculty members alike with her calm demeanor, her sense of fun and her care and concern for others. One writer tells us that after her first month at MIT she discovered that her paycheck had not been issued. In a panic, she went to JoAnn who spent a significant amount of her day making sure the paycheck would be issued in time to pay the rent. The writer is sure JoAnn would have written her a personal check if her attempts had been unsuccessful.

Another letter writer tells us that JoAnn is an incredible source of information and help. She is an amazing person: intelligent, organized, efficient and amiable. She is calm and approachable.

New faculty to BE are especially indebted to JoAnn, for her resourcefulness, patience, eagerness to help and her natural propensity to calmly solve problems, while maintaining the highest standard of professionalism and a very reassuring and personable demeanor. She is described as a constant positive and integrative influence in the BE community. Within the local building 16/56 community, she provides constant support for ensuring that shared facilities and other resources are well maintained for optimal productivity. She makes every effort to foster interactions among the various laboratories. Students and postdocs especially love receiving her unexpected emails alerting them to delicious treats in the lunchroom, an occurrence that often catalyzes spontaneous social and scientific interactions among them.

We are told that JoAnn applies her knowledge actively and innovatively in her work. Her personal attention and support are greatly valued. JoAnn is
highly motivated to building strong relationships with her colleagues. Even in a department where a high degree of collegiality is the norm, her compassion and attention to the daily needs of students, staff and faculty are remarkable and create a strong sense of belonging that lies at the heart of the welcoming work environment in BE.

JoAnn, on behalf of BE, the School of Engineering and the Institute we are very pleased to present you with an Ellen J. Mandigo Award for Outstanding Service.
Lourenco Pires

Our final award winner today is Lourenco Pires, a Technical Instructor in EECS, where he has worked since 1982.

Lourenco’s nomination for this award consisted of what might be an unprecedented number of detailed letters from faculty members. Limiting myself to 400 plus words for this citation was very, very difficult. So I didn’t. But I hope you will all find this citation as inspiring as I found Lourenco’s nomination.

Lourenco is best known and appreciated as the person responsible for the physical demonstrations EECS faculty members use in over a dozen classes. We are told that, “he maintains a small warehouse full of these demonstrations, creates new ones instantly on request, and demonstrates them anywhere – literally all over campus and beyond – to crowds of appreciative students and in support of hugely grateful lecturers. . . . There are no obstacles that he will not overcome to improve the experience of our students.”

One faculty member wrote, “during my lengthy interaction with (Lourenco) . . . I am most impressed by his devotion to the job and his unusual enthusiasm for these demos and the pride he took in their improvement.”

Another faculty member tells us that he is working with Lourenco to create an archival record of the present electromagnetism demonstrations and plans to co-author a publication with Lourenco describing their design and operation.

Yet another faculty member writes of his interactions with Lourenco while teaching 6.002 to as many as 200 students, “Lourenco has been a central figure in creating, maintaining and executing the demonstrations for 6.002.” He goes on to describe what happened several years ago, when 6.002 was moved to a new classroom. On his own initiative, Lourenco went to the classroom the day before and tested an already well-established demo on the operation of radio systems. Lourenco discovered that there was insufficient radio reception in the room and quickly built a radio transmitter out of laboratory equipment, enabling the demonstrations to proceed on schedule the next day.
Another faculty member writes that “in one demo on amplifiers, we had him bring in his guitar, and play a piece – we realized he was actually an accomplished guitarist.” (Francis, did you know that?) In another demo, Lourenco and the faculty member had prepped the faculty member for a live electro cardiogram demo, but for some reason, the system did not pick up the faculty member’s heartbeat, despite having worked flawlessly in their rehearsal. While the faculty member was covering other material, Lourenco discreetly put the electrodes on himself and made it work.

Yet another faculty member writes that all he has to do is give Lourenco his lecture syllabus at the beginning of the term and Lourenco figures out which demonstrations are needed and when, although it might have been several years since the faculty member taught the course. During class, if the faculty member reaches for a wrong knob or button, Lourenco will quietly push his hand to the right knob. The same faculty member notes that Lourenco is always thrilled with the opportunity to build a new demonstration and will spend long hours to make it just right.

One faculty member wrote that he has had the opportunity both as a student and as a faculty member to work with and learn from Lourenco, who, he says, “gives the illusion of being three people. . . (appearing) everywhere and anywhere with heavy carts of delicate equipment. Most if not all of these demonstrations are delicate and finicky . . . (but) in 24 years over half a dozen classes, I have never seen Lourenco miss a beat.”

We are told that “the joy of teaching students of any age fuels Lorenco’s generosity with his time, spirit, resources, and intellect . . . His skill and good humor are legend with our students and our alumni . . .”

Lourenco, your knowledge, your skill, your enthusiasm and your dedication inspire in us the same awe that your demonstrations inspire in your students, and it is with pride and gratitude that we present you with an Ellen J. Mandigo Award for Outstanding Service.