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The Week at Roger

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He Made Us Better: RWU Remembers Dean Potter

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BRISTOL, R.I. – As the University community grieves the loss of SECCM Dean Robert "Bob" Potter earlier this month, we are celebrating what he has meant to many of us who worked and learned with him, and the formidable legacy he leaves us.

“Dean Potter was the life of the Engineering Department. He had pride in his faculty and students. He set the standard for what it meant to be an engineer,” said Ashley Bosse '20, who studied Environmental Engineering at SECCM.

His legacy will certainly endure at RWU through his dedication to the School of Engineering, Computing and Construction Management, the RWU club hockey

team, and the countless lives he influenced throughout his career.

Dean Potter came to RWU in 2000 after a 27-year military career, which included nine years of teaching engineering at The United States Military Academy at West Point, his alma mater. In 2001, Potter became Dean of SECCM, and his career included a period of service as RWU's Interim Provost. He planned to retire at the end of the 2020-21 school year.

SECCM thrived under Potter's leadership. The school saw national recognition for its [Engineering](#) and [Construction Management](#) programs. Students earned top honors at [regional](#), [national](#), and [international](#) competitions. This success carried forth into the SECCM students' careers, with 100% job placement for SECCM graduates in their field of study within six months of graduation.

Potter ensured that the Construction Management, Computer Science, and Engineering programs all achieved, and maintained, accreditation from the most reputable agencies.

“Not only did we get accreditation, but our effort was used as an example for other schools,” said Professor of Engineering Janet Baldwin. “Every single time we’ve gone up for re- accreditation we’ve gotten the

full six years, which is quite extraordinary. External accreditation is essential, but also a big deal. The fact that we achieved that for all our programs is fantastic and I'm not sure we could have done that without Bob."

Dean Potter

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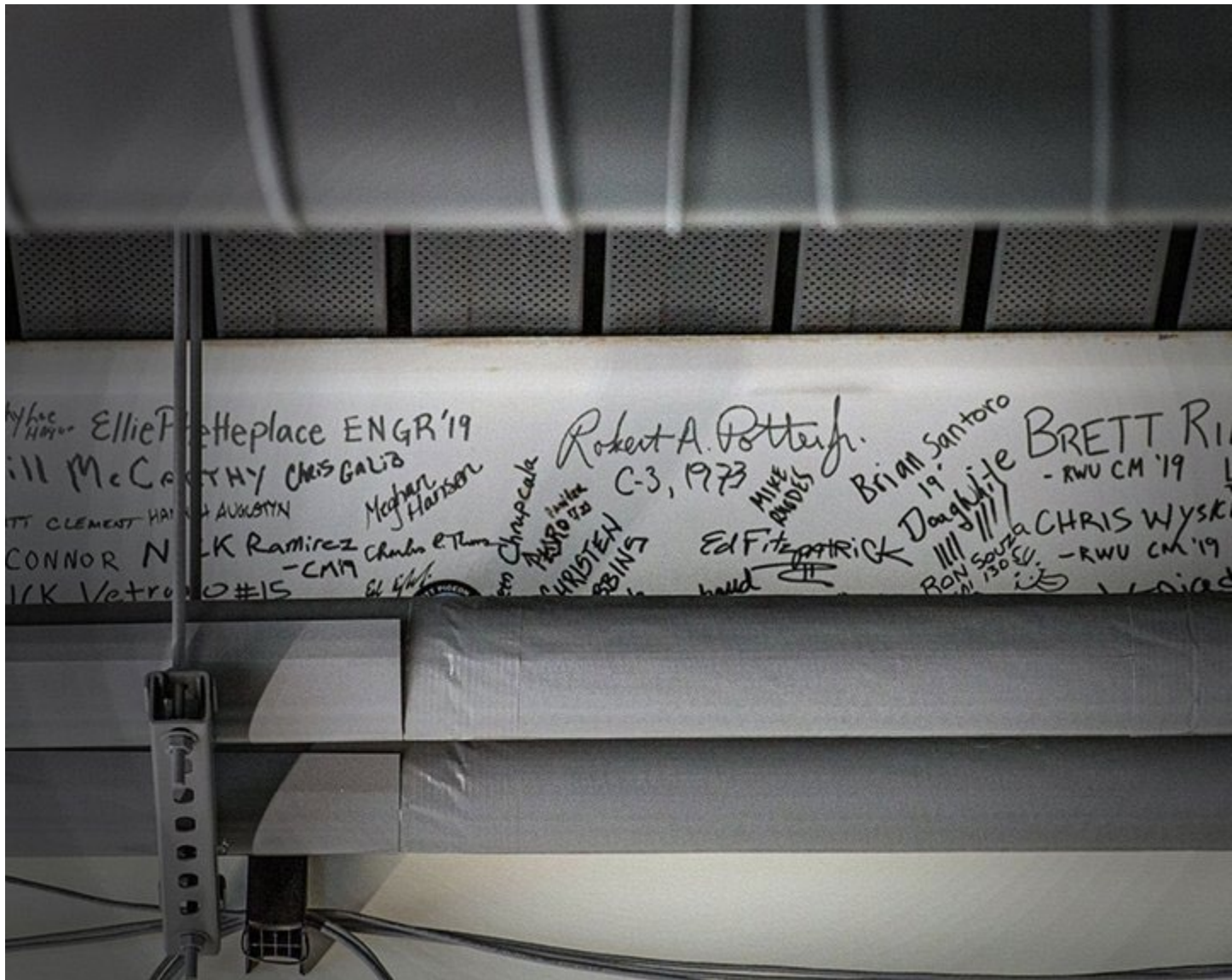












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Robert A. Pottery
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SECCM Labs

Potter's most visible contribution to RWU is the SECCM Labs building, a state-of-the-art, 27,000 square foot laboratory building completed in early 2020.

“When we say he was the driving force behind SECCM Labs, it's because without Dean Potter, we

would not have that building,” said Professor of Computer Science Anthony Ruocco.

“He had the vision for the building. He was able to articulate what we needed to get approval for the building, and he got sponsors. He worked with the design firms and construction firms, so he knew everything that was happening in that building when it was being built. He was able to compromise on some things, but never on the fundamental purpose of what that building was supposed to do,” said Ruocco.



Potter gave his all to his work on every front, from the small details, such as thoroughly washing his

blackboards after each use, to the big-picture growth and development of the school.

“Dean Potter always made sure to get the people that volunteered for SECCM a food ticket to use once we were done giving tours of the building. He always made sure the building was in tip-top shape and could often be found straightening the chairs in the lobby or moving fallen or outdated posters,” said Olivia Ryan '20, Potter's advisee. “During every advising meeting, he showed his excitement towards whatever post-grad plan I was considering that semester, and wholeheartedly believed that I could do anything I set my mind to.”

“His shoes were always polished to a shine. He was a man of confidence but humble to a fault. If there was work ahead that involved getting dirty, he would let you know what day would work best for him to come in dressed accordingly and he would be there right beside you moving equipment or whatever needed to be done,” said James Dorothy, SECCM's Director of Operations.

Club Hockey

Potter was also instrumental in the creation of RWU's club hockey team. Since its creation in 2009, Potter advised the club, bringing his signature style of dedication and excellence.

“He managed all the paperwork and equipment needed to keep the hockey team successful and would always go to the games to cheer them on. You always knew when it was game day because Bob would print out a brochure with the team members' names and who they were playing,” said Dorothy.

Potter took great pride in the team’s many successes, which include multiple Northeast Collegiate Hockey Association Championship [wins](#).

Loved and Respected

Beyond his impressive accomplishments, Potter is remembered for his optimism, sense of humor, personability, and his unwavering support for his students and colleagues.

“Dean Potter was loved and respected by pretty much everyone who knew him. Stereotypically, well-liked Professors are well-liked because they are lenient and easy, but anyone who has sat through a 7am Thermodynamics or Heat Transfer class after a snow day knows that was not what made Dean Potter loved,” said Engineering alum Briana Tremblay '17.

“So, why was he so loved? I believe that we love people who make us better, which is exactly what Dean Potter did throughout his life. He had a way of pushing students, faculty, and everyone around him to accomplish things that they never thought that they

could, all with a lighthearted and fun attitude,” said Tremblay.

Faculty, as well as students, benefitted from Potter’s commitment to help those around him grow and achieve.

“When he came in and observed your class, it wasn’t just to meet the requirement that the Dean observes the faculty. He was deeply interested in how your class went. There was an honest sense that he did it to help us all be better teachers because he loved the art and science of teaching. That was critical to him in everything he did,” said Ruocco.

“Dean Potter set the standard for what a leader should be,” said Civil Engineering alum Aubrey McLaughlin ’20.

“His unexpected passing leaves a wake of sadness for the University as a whole, but he set the bar high for the next dean to come,” McLaughlin said. “His legacy lies in the engineering professors, students, and program that he has shaped over the years. I hope Dean Potter knew that his pride in all of us was matched by our pride to have him as our Dean, professor, and mentor.”

Dean Potter died early on Oct. 7 at Rhode Island Hospital after sustaining inoperable injuries in a car

accident. His wife of 45 years, Patricia "Patty" Ades Potter, was with him. He was 69.

Many friends, and colleagues and students, past and present, have shared messages of remembrance on [this page, Remembering Dean Potter.](#)