

2023 PRESIDENT'S MEDAL RECIPIENTS

The Ralston Family



Helen and the late George Ralston pictured in 2007.

There are few families more embedded in the history of Wilkes University than the Ralstons.

The Ralstons serve as true examples of what it means to “Be Colonel,” through their leadership, mentorship and volunteerism at the University. The heart of their campus and Colonel spirit is best represented in the facility that bears their name, the Ralston Athletic Complex.

The Ralston family’s nearly 80-year connection to Wilkes started with George Ralston, affectionately referred to as the “Father of Wilkes Athletics.” George served as dean, athletic director, coach, professor and mentor to generations of Wilkes students and student-athletes for 60+ years.

George met his wife, Helen, at Wilkes, and she earned her music degree in 1952. As the informal “Queen of Campus,” Helen would appear in Wilkes and community stage productions and would often lead in the singing of the alma mater at university events. She used her Wilkes degree to share her love of music and give vocal lessons to students out of her home. For nearly 75 years, she was a soloist at First Presbyterian Church in downtown Wilkes-Barre, a congregation to which she continues to belong.

Prior to Wilkes, George completed his military service and was a World War II veteran. He received an array of honorary degrees, including from Wilkes in 1997. Though Wilkes students were the couple’s priority, George was dedicated to several community organizations. In honor of that work, he was the recipient of the William Booth Award, the Salvation Army’s highest honor. For Helen, her focus was and continues to be on church, education and family.

The four Ralston sons, David ’69, John ’79, Tom ’80 and James ’88, were “born Wilkes Colonels.” In fact, three generations of Ralstons earned degrees from Wilkes, spanning from 1952 to 2014. Tom is a long-standing member of the Wilkes alumni association and board of trustees, using his passion for Wilkes and knowledge of the University to help shape the campus and experience for others.

In addition to their four sons, there are five grandchildren: Breanne ’12, Alyssa ’14, Nancy, George and Shane, and three great grandchildren. Helen Ralston, 97, resides in Wilkes-Barre. George Ralston passed away in 2007 but lives eternally in the heart of his children and in the spirit of Wilkes University.

2023 INAUGURAL CHAIRMAN'S AWARD

Robert A. Mugford '58 and Tara Mugford Wilson



Power Engineering is a family-owned mechanical construction firm specializing in heating, ventilation, air conditioning, humidity control, refrigeration and process pipe projects in the commercial, industrial and institutional arenas.

Bob Mugford started as a sales engineer at Power Engineering in 1965, purchasing the company and becoming the organization's

board chair in 1979. Bob continues to consult as owner and board chair of the company he built. Bob, a first-generation college student, earned his associate degree in engineering from Wilkes College in 1958 and went on to receive his bachelor's degree in mechanical engineering from Penn State in 1961, earning his professional engineering license in 1967. Bob joined the Wilkes board of trustees in 1995 and, in 2011, was named trustee emeritus.

Tara Mugford Wilson succeeded her father as president of Power Engineering in 2016. She has served on the Wilkes University board of trustees since 2020. A leader in the local community, Tara received the 2019 Athena Award for her community service and professional excellence. She serves as a trustee at Wyoming Seminary College Preparatory School, is vice chair of both the United Way of Wyoming Valley and the Wilkes-Barre Chamber of Business and Industry. In 2022, she became the first woman to serve as chair of the Luzerne Foundation. Tara is also the owner of Shooze Contemporary Boutique in Kingston.

Through the legacy and leadership of Bob, Tara and their dedicated team, Power Engineering Corporation has helped transform the Wilkes campus for more than four decades. The company was a dedicated partner on the construction and renovation of some of the most notable buildings on campus, including the Henry Student Center, Chase Hall, Stark Learning Center, Breiseth Hall, the Cohen Science Center and the Karambelas Media and Communications Center.

Bob resides in Dallas with his wife Cathy. In addition to Tara, they are parents to Jennifer Necessary, a graduate of the inaugural class of the Wilkes Nesbitt School of Pharmacy, and Susanne Reeves.

Wilson is a graduate of Wyoming Seminary and Drexel University. She resides in Dallas with her companion, Dan Petrishin, and her children, Robert and Alexandra Wilson. In addition, Bob and Cathy are grandparents to William and Catherine Necessary and Robbie, Olivia and Jackson Reeves.