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FOR THE LOVE OF ART AND ALMA MATER

ON A GOLDEN AFTERNOON IN WESTFIELD, N.J., DOROTHY “DOTTY” WEISS GINGERLY GRASPED A PENCIL AND SKETCHED SEVERAL SNOWDROPS HARVESTED FROM HER FLOWER GARDEN. THE SIMPLE ACT BROUGHT HER GREAT JOY—AS DID THE SCULPTURES AND PAINTINGS SHE CREATED OVER THE YEARS.

BEFORE HER PASSING ON MAY 11, 2015, THE 93-YEAR-OLD WIDOW OF J. RICHARD WEISS '42 EMBRACED ART AND MUSIC, TWIN PASSIONS THE COUPLE SHARED THROUGHOUT THEIR 70-YEAR MARRIAGE.

A nearby desk drawer held dozens of CDs from iconic music artists, including Bennie Goodman and Leonard Bernstein, people she and her late husband once counted among their dearest acquaintances.

“We knew a lot of people who were in the music field and we enjoyed being close to artists, because they were important people to us,” said Weiss during an interview only a few weeks before her death. “When we had an opportunity to buy into the jazz scene, we did that because music was important to us.”

The couple became lifelong music patrons and members of

jazz societies in New Jersey and Pennsylvania. They also developed a fond loyalty to WPI, which played a role in making their dreams possible.

When the two met in 1940, Richard was halfway through his chemical engineering program at WPI. A “studious fellow,” according to Dotty, he had a keen mind, a zest for life, and—like many young men of that era—a limited budget. In fact, during his first year in Worcester, he lived with an older couple and worked on their furnace in trade for housing.

But a full scholarship to attend WPI allowed the New Orleans native to develop the skills he would later use during his 45-year career with pharmaceutical giant Merck and Company.

“It was a blessing that Mr. Weiss had that scholarship, and so we always felt connected to WPI,” Dotty said. “We don’t have children, but we always had WPI and enjoyed donating to it over the years.”

The Weisses gave faithfully to the Annual Fund, supported WPI athletics, and attended class reunions. Richard served as a class agent and he encouraged his fellow alumni to support the school; he often visited campus to recruit WPI graduates for positions at Merck. Even as a student, he



This image of Mamie Moffitt and her 5 Jazz Hounds is included in the Weiss Jazz History Database

proved a natural leader and a generous contributor of his time and talent. He participated in sports, the Masque theatre organization, several honor societies, and Theta Chi fraternity, for which he served as treasurer and later as president.

Dorothy Weiss continued her husband’s generous legacy by committing more than \$2.5 million to the Foisie Innovation Studio, the Weiss Jazz History Database, and the Weiss scholarship. The Dorothy and J. Richard Weiss '42 Endowed Scholarship establishes a fund to help recruit and support students like Richard who have the talent and the drive, but need the financial means to fulfill their calling.

The Weiss Jazz History Database, founded and directed by Rich Falco, assistant teaching professor of music and director of jazz studies at WPI, will help rescue, preserve, and archive historically significant materials related to jazz

music, such as old recordings, photographs, television footage, and artist interviews.

The Weiss gift will also provide space in the Foisie Innovation Studio for displaying original work at the intersection of the humanities and arts and the STEM fields, created by students. Known as the Connector, it will also highlight alumni inventions and student projects.

Dotty Weiss hoped this space will help campus visitors realize the value not only of WPI’s technical instruction but of its humanities program. “I would like people to visit WPI and become acquainted with the music and art as well as the engineering, because I think music and art are a very important part of anybody’s life,” she said. “The more of it we have in our lives, the more joy we experience. And, music and the arts are things you can enjoy for your whole lifetime.”