

Western Massachusetts Entrepreneurship Hall of Fame Celebrates 10th Anniversary;
Class of 2009 to be Inducted on October 8

The history of Western Massachusetts can be traced through stories of businesses and entrepreneurs whose drive and creativity contributed to the economic as well as the social and cultural development of our region. As the 10th anniversary of the Western Massachusetts Entrepreneurship Hall of Fame is celebrated at the banquet on October 8, the Class of 2009 will join 50 other individuals and businesses whose achievements are familiar in this region. All of their stories are chronicled at www.eshiphall.com. The hall of fame was established in 2000 by Springfield Technical Community College; plaques and photos are on view in the Scibelli Enterprise Center in the Technology Park at STCC.

“Everything is possible to those who dare”- the quote used on the unique awards presented to inductees or their descendants - is from **Albert Goodwill Spalding**, founder of what became Spalding Sports Worldwide, and a member of the Hall of Fame’s Class of 2000.

Born in 1815, Spalding showed great talent in the relatively new game of baseball, at one point pitching for Boston, and was instrumental in making the rowdy sport respectable again, as America’s national game. Organizing baseball tours around the world, Spalding was also a prime mover in establishing the National League. He retired in 1875 to work with his brother in developing a sporting goods business, which became the largest and best-known company in its field, and eventually the oldest in the world. In 1900 he was honored by President McKinley and appointed Commissioner of the Olympic Games in Paris.

Zenas Crane (Class of 2000) founded Crane and Company of Dalton in 1801, a firm which came to be known not only for its fine stationery, but particularly as the source of the paper used for American currency. Crane’s father Stephen had sold currency paper to Paul Revere for use as the American Colonies’ first paper money, and, in 1820, Zenas provided the Massachusetts government with paper for official state documents. In 1884, a major technological breakthrough occurred under Zenas Crane Jr.’s leadership, when the firm developed a method to embed silk threads in the notes as a deterrent to counterfeiting. In 1879, W. Murray Crane won a heated competition for the contract to supply the U. S. Government with its currency paper, a contract Crane has held ever since. In 1995, Crane began producing watermarked paper for the redesigned U.S. paper money, and Lansing E. Crane, of the firm’s sixth generation, became the CEO. Crane’s currency paper is used by countries throughout the world and its fine papers are recognized as being of the highest quality.

Inducted into the Class of 2001, **Primus P. Mason** was an adventurer, successful entrepreneur, and generous philanthropist. Born of African-American parents in 1817, Mason worked as a teamster, and gradually amassed a real estate fortune valued at \$1,000. Swept up in the excitement of the 1849 Gold Rush, he moved to California, and returned as a fairly wealthy man, continuing to prosper by astutely investing in real estate. He purchased undeveloped land in the Hill area of Springfield, and later sold it to the McKnight brothers for a substantial profit. In 1850, Mason purchased the triangular piece of land at the junction of Wilbraham Road and State Street, now named for him. He sold the property to

the City for \$65 on the condition that it be used for public purposes. Mason died in 1892, leaving \$25,000 to be used for a Home for Aged Men. Starting with a house on Walnut Street in 1904, the home was expanded with a new building in 1924. By 1958 the endowment had grown to \$1.7 million, and today, Mason's dream is the Mason-Wright Retirement Community.

George Washington Rice (Class of 2001), a successful insurance salesman, had a dream to form his own insurance company in Massachusetts in the mid-1800s. He had the energy, drive, and skill, but needed a \$100,000 investment to charter and operate the company. Rice enlisted 31 leading citizens of Springfield as initial stock investors, put up \$5,000 of his own money, and turned to his cousin **Caleb Rice** for help, both as an initial investor and for his connections as the first County Commissioner in Hampden County and the County Sheriff. Together they formed the Massachusetts Mutual Life Insurance Company, first located on the corner of State and Main Streets. George died at the age of 32 from tuberculosis, and never saw the exponential growth of his company. Under Caleb's leadership as president, the business relocated to its current location, then the eastern section of Springfield. Caleb was also elected the first mayor of Springfield.

The **Albert Steiger** (Class of 2002) story began in Huntington, Mass. in 1869 when the family emigrated from Germany. Originally from Switzerland, the family had two generations of expertise in the textile industry, and Albert's father designed a power loom, which was patented and installed in the Huntington mill where he worked. Within three years of moving to America, Albert's father, grandfather, uncle, and brother had died, leaving the 13-year-old boy as the head of the family. He left school and embarked on a sales career. In 1894, having devised a plan to enable department stores of smaller cities to give better service and earn more profit, he opened a dry-goods store in Port Chester, New York. Four years later he established another store, on High Street in Holyoke. By 1912, Steiger owned five stores, and was widely regarded as New England's merchant prince. The "Steiger System" flourished, and the company ultimately became the largest retailer in New England. Steiger's business acumen was equaled by his commitment to his employees and to the community at large. On his death in 1938, he left a legacy of successful retailing and community service to successive generations of the Steiger family. Gradually the world of retailing became dominated by national chain stores, and in 1994, after 100 years in business, the Steiger System was purchased by the May department stores.

Although world-famous for the games he invented and the company which bore his name, **Milton Bradley's** (Class of 2003) creativity and interests spanned several fields. Born in 1836 in Maine, he moved to Springfield in 1856 and worked as a draftsman at the Wason Car Company, at one point designing a private car for the Khedive of Egypt. Becoming interested in lithography, he opened the first color lithography business in the state. Bradley's first big printing job began when Springfield Republican publisher **Samuel Bowles** (Class of 2003) suggested he reproduce a picture of Abraham Lincoln. The photo sold successfully until Lincoln grew a beard, and Bradley then turned to other pursuits. He created a parlor game called The Checkered Game of Life, another called The Wheel of Life, which was an early version of a moving picture machine, and a series of games for Civil War soldiers to play. He also printed manuals for games, and patented a set of rules for croquet, which soon became standard. In 1869, Bradley became a forerunner in the movement to establish kindergartens in America. He printed the first book in English on the concept of kindergarten, and wrote others. The first kindergarten in Springfield was taught by Bradley's father, and attended by his daughters. He even manufactured counting blocks,

used to help children with arithmetic. Other Bradley inventions include the paper cutter, still common in offices today, and the color wheel used in the printing industry. Bradley died in 1911, but the Milton Bradley Company, which he founded in 1860, now part of Hasbro Inc., and is the largest game and puzzle maker in the world.

William Skinner (Class of 2004) and his descendants are known as well for their philanthropic gifts to social and educational institutions in this region as they are for the highest quality silk thread and satin fabrics they produced and for their business innovation and expertise. Nineteen-year-old William Skinner left England in 1843 for better opportunities in the new world. When he died in 1902, the William Skinner and Sons silk and satin mills in Holyoke were earning revenues of \$6.5 million and employing 1000 people. The company that Skinner created became the largest producer of satin linings in the world. William Skinner and his family were devoted to their communities and to improving their quality of life. His son Joseph may have expressed this best. Asked "What could be finer than silk?" he replied, "It is our character woven into our lives which makes the world better or worse than when we came into it, so character is finer than silk." William Skinner was a founder of Holyoke Hospital, and helped build a Holyoke church, YMCA and Public Library, as well as donating liberally to Mount Holyoke and Vassar Colleges. His daughter Belle founded an organization to help French villages recover from the devastation of World War I, and personally "adopted" a village, pouring \$1 million of her own money into rebuilding and improving it. In Holyoke, Belle and her younger sister Katherine founded the Skinner Coffee House to serve the needs of immigrants who worked in the mills and factories. She and her brother William inherited the family mansion, Wistariahurst, which in 1959 was given to the City of Holyoke as a museum. Joseph Skinner echoed his father's strong interest in higher education for women, and served on the Board of Mount Holyoke College from 1905 to 1931. He left his mansion to the college as well as other buildings, funds, land, and the Orchards golf course, which he had built for his daughter.

Known variously as The Springfield Fair, The Show Window of the East, the Eastern States Exposition, and finally the Big E, the agricultural fair established by **Joshua Loring Brooks** (Class of 2005) in 1916 has become an institution that draws a million people each September to the 175-acre fairgrounds in West Springfield. As the industrial revolution, increasing competition and scientific advances overshadowed traditional agriculture in the early years of the 20th century, Brooks and prominent businessmen such as Horace A. Moses, founder of Strathmore Paper, sought to revitalize regional agriculture. Brooks said, "If the farmer fails to adopt the resources of both science and business, he cannot hold his own. Unless New England's farmers are successful, her industries will suffer." Over the following decades, the fair expanded and changed, adding horse shows, the Avenue of States, Storowton Village, youth activities, and popular entertainment. Political leaders and celebrities from Dwight Eisenhower to Roy Rogers visited the site, and attendance grew yearly. Brooks served as President of the Eastern States Exposition from 1914 to 1942 and was Honorary President until his death in 1949. Today, the Exposition grounds are the site of not only the annual 17-day Big E but also dozens of other trade and consumer shows and events such as the machine tool trade show, the Western Mass. Home Show, a boat show, and an antiques and collectibles show.

It is one of the most famous and enduring brands in the world: **Smith & Wesson** (Class of 2006). The name has become part of American culture and the industrial history of this region. Like others of the region's notable entrepreneurs, Horace Smith began his career at

the Springfield Armory. He served as an apprentice, and later started his own gun-making business. He had worked at several gun-component makers, including a rifle barrel maker called Allen, Brown, and Luther. Also working for that company was a gunsmith named Daniel Baird Wesson. The two would eventually become business partners and forge several breakthroughs in firearms production. The first of these was a cartridge that became a feature on a pistol they patented, with a distinct repeating action that was incorporated into the world-famous Winchester rifle. Later, the two men produced the Smith & Wesson revolver, adopted by the U.S. military and several foreign governments. It would help make the company one of the largest gun manufacturers in the world. In 1899, the company introduced its most famous revolver, the .38 caliber Model 10, which has been in continuous production ever since. While Horace Smith and Daniel Baird Wesson left their mark in the gun industry, they also left it in Springfield, as well, particularly through the Wesson family's strong track record of philanthropy.

George and Charles Merriam (Class of 2007), who grew up in their father's printing office in West Brookfield, opened a printing and book-selling shop in Springfield in 1831 called G. & C. Merriam Co. They inherited the Noah Webster legacy when they purchased the unsold copies of the 1841 edition of *An American Dictionary of the English Language, Corrected and Enlarged* from Webster's heirs after the great man's death in 1843. At the same time, they secured the rights to create revised editions of that work. The two, who are credited with popularizing, or democratizing the dictionary, thus began a publishing tradition that has given the world some of the most famous dictionaries ever made, including the groundbreaking Webster's Third New International Dictionary, Unabridged, or simply Webster's Third, in 1961, and the popular Collegiate, now in its 11th edition, which was introduced in 1898. Today, while researchers and editors continue the ongoing process of adding to the dictionary and refining definitions, they are also delivering the dictionary in ways – through websites, CD ROMs, portable hand-held devices, and even cell phones - that Noah Webster could never have imagined.

The horse liniment that **Wilbur Young** (Class of 2008) and his wife Mary Ida concocted in a tub in their farmhouse kitchen would become one of the more recognizable brands in health care — Absorbine Jr. They even coined the phrase 'athlete's foot' in the process of marketing one of their later creations. The company they grew together, W.F. Young, has been a fixture in Greater Springfield, and a major employer, for more than a century. Wilbur discovered that Absorbine Veterinary Liniment, a blend of herbs and essential oils that would keep a horse from going lame while gently reducing swelling and stiffness. But it was another discovery — that the product worked just as well as humans — that allowed the business venture to really take off. That product would come to be called Absorbine Jr. Antiseptic Liniment. It was brought to the marketplace in 1903, and it's been in continuous production ever since. Today, the company typically introduces between five and ten new products a year, with recent additions including new insect repellants for horses and an amino-acid supplement that helps boost strength and stamina in horses. The company has transitioned out of manufacturing and now bills itself as a virtual marketing company. Production is outsourced throughout the U.S.; however, the operations department of the company manages production from the company's local headquarters.

Other individuals and families of more recent vintage – the Davis family of American Saw and Manufacturing, the Picknelly family of Peter Pan Bus Lines, Emanuel Rovithis of Manny's TV and Appliance, and many others - have been honored over the past nine years by the Western Massachusetts Entrepreneurship Hall of Fame.

The tenth anniversary Class of 2009 will include the regional law firm Bacon Wilson; the Cambi family, founders of Springfield Foodservice Corporation; Larry Derose, founder of Texcel Inc., maker of medical instruments and devices for the healthcare field; the Desrosiers family, three generations of owners of Hadley Printing; John Gormally, founder of BusinessWest magazine and owner of ABC40 and FOX6; and the Peters family, founders and owners of Universal Plastics.