

Thomas V. Falkie '56, '58g, '61g

After five decades in "challenging and rewarding" careers in mining-related positions in industry, government, and academia, Dr. Thomas Falkie recalls that his father told him to stay out of the mines. "As did most of the coal miner fathers in Mt. Carmel," Falkie explains. "My father had an eighth-grade education and he wanted more for me." Falkie's ticket out of the fading coal region was a scholarship in mining engineering sponsored by the Reading Anthracite Company. As part of the selection process, candidates had to meet with the company's president, Ed Fox '25, '30g (1956 Distinguished Alumnus). On the way to the interview, Falkie's father told him, "Look, I don't want you to get your hopes up. Ed Fox was my superintendent when I was head of the local mineworkers union." Falkie won the scholarship and later worked for Fox, who became one of his mentors, during summer breaks. He chose Penn State over Lehigh and Lafayette, in part because it was more affordable. "By that time I had done some research and knew that it had the best program also," he recalls.



Falkie received his bachelor's degree in 1956 and stayed on to earn a master's and doctorate, all in mining engineering. Following a stint in industry, he returned to Penn State in 1969 as head of the newly formed Department of Mineral Engineering when his former professor and mentor, Bob Stefanko, "talked me into it," he laughs. He left in 1974 to be director of the Bureau of Mines in the U.S. Department of the Interior. "President Nixon appointed me," Falkie says. "I couldn't pass up what most people at the time considered the top job in mining." He served throughout the Ford administration. "With the first so-called energy crisis going on then, it was an exciting time to be involved in developing energy policy and overseeing the federal government's R&D programs for coal and minerals." In 1977, Falkie joined Berwind Natural Resources Corporation, a company that mines coal, produces natural gas, and is a major mineral lands owner in Appalachia. Though he recently retired as president and chairman, he continues to sit on the board of the company.

Among his many honors, Falkie was elected to the National Academy of Engineering in 1989, has served as president of the American Institute of Mining, Metallurgical, and Petroleum Engineers (AIME), and was elected an honorary member of AIME in 1995—a distinction currently held by only 72 of the 90,000 members. Falkie also was president of the Society for Mining, Metallurgy, and Exploration (SME) and has been chairman of the American Coal Foundation since 1994. He is chairman of the Board of Governors for the National Mining Hall of Fame and Museum in Leadville, Colo. and is active in several professional, industry, and civic organizations.

Penn State previously honored Falkie in 1986 as an Alumni Fellow and he received the Robert Stefanko Award for Distinguished Achievement in Mineral Engineering in 1995. Falkie has served the College of Earth and Mineral Sciences as a member of the Industrial and Professional Advisory Committee and the Global Business Advisory Committee. He has chaired several successful fund-raising initiatives including serving as chair of the college's Grand Destiny Campaign committee. Along with his late wife, Jean, he established the Falkie Faculty Fellowship in Mining Engineering. Three of his five children are Penn State graduates.

*This career summary is excerpted from the 2004 Distinguished Alumni Awards Ceremony booklet (June 4, 2004, The Pennsylvania State University).