

## Edward P. Zemprelli '45

Ed Zemprelli has sharp memories of his undergraduate days on campus. As a member of the forensics team, he traveled "all over" debating the draft, a timely topic with World War II raging. "A speech professor we called 'Captain' O'Brien coached us," he recalls. "We did quite well until we got to Moravian College, where two girls kicked the pants off us!" Tapped for Skull & Bones, one "honor" of membership in the society was working the first-down markers during football games. "We'd be down there on the sidelines with our Skull & Bones hats on, getting knocked over by the football players," he laughs.



Zemprelli also watched the Nittany Lion Shrine emerge from a block of Indiana limestone. "I rented a room just behind New Beaver Field (then adjacent to Rec Hall) and my liberal arts classes were all over campus," he says. His daily bicycle ride took him past the statue's sculptor, Heinz Warneke, at work with his chisels. "He didn't speak English and I didn't speak German, but we managed to communicate," Zemprelli recalls. "I offered a few suggestions, though I'm not sure he followed them."

Zemprelli's facility with communication has served him well as a practicing attorney and state legislator. After Penn State, the native of Clairton, in Pittsburgh's Mon Valley, received his law degree from the University of Pittsburgh in 1949. He was admitted to the bar in 1950 and still practices 54 years later. "I have a general practice. For the last few years I've done mostly estate planning, real estate, and government relations," he says. Zemprelli was first elected to the General Assembly in a 1963 special election and stayed for six years. He was elected to the state senate in 1969, serving as both majority and minority leader and as chair of the Business and Commerce Committee during his 20-year tenure. As such, Zemprelli was widely considered one of the most influential Democrats in Pennsylvania.

"I was both pro-business and pro-labor," Zemprelli says by way of explaining his longevity in politics. His senate terms (1969-1988) coincided with some tough economic times in Pennsylvania, particularly in his home district, where the steel industry was declining. He jokes that his accomplishments in government "aren't too interesting" but important nonetheless. They included reforming banking laws that allowed for greater competition and saving \$500 million in unemployment compensation that would have bankrupted the state. His peers awarded him the Distinguished Legislative Leader Award at the National Conference of State Legislators in 1988.

In 1978 Governor Milton Shapp appointed Zemprelli to the Penn State Board of Trustees, where he served until 1996. During that time he was involved in selecting three presidents: Bryce Jordan, Joab Thomas, and Graham Spanier. "They're all very different in character but, in each case, I think we came up with the right person at the right time," he says. The lifelong Democrat was also impressed by the bipartisan cooperation he saw on the board then and now. "I always thought people put their private interests aside and truly thought about what was best for the University." He was named Trustee Emeritus in 1997.

Zemprelli also has served as a trustee for the University of Pittsburgh, which named him a distinguished alumnus in 1988. Zemprelli and his wife, Margaret, have one daughter, also a Penn State graduate.

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