



DISTINGUISHED ALUMNI AWARDS

Robert E. Fenza '80



To Robert E. Fenza for advancing “green” real estate development and for helping to educate tomorrow’s architects.

As a boy, Rob Fenza worked summers on his uncle’s farm. During high school, he studied horticulture and floriculture. At age 17, he was a produce buyer for a suburban Philadelphia farm and garden mart, getting up at 3:30 a.m. two days a week and heading down to the produce docks with thousands of dollars of cash in his pocket to buy produce, truck it back to the store, and unload it before class.

As college approached, his career goal was a toss-up between farmer or real estate developer. Real estate developer won, but he designed his own Penn State degree—a bachelor’s in philosophy with a multidisciplinary focus on landscape architecture, horticulture, planning, real estate, and business. “I earned my way through school, and I wanted to get my money’s worth,” he said. Fenza managed an apartment building, operated a landscaping business, and bartended, all while studying for his college classes.

Graduating in 1980 when interest rates were high and jobs were scarce, Fenza

worked for a real estate appraisal firm and then as director of operations for a public-private low-income housing partnership. Meanwhile, every year he sent his résumé to Willard Rouse III, founder of Rouse & Associates, a leading real estate developer and predecessor to Liberty Property Trust. He never got a reply—until 1984, when the two met through low-income housing work, and Rouse offered him a job as managing partner for the Lehigh Valley region.

Now, 29 years later, Fenza is executive vice president and chief operating officer of Liberty, a \$7 billion real estate investment trust that owns 80.5 million square feet of office and industrial space in more than 21 markets throughout the U.S. and the United Kingdom. Along the way, he helped turn Liberty into one of the country’s leading developers of high-performance, environmentally friendly, “green” office and industrial buildings.

“Sustainability is a mind-set,” he said. “We want the environment inside and outside the building to be rejuvenating.” Liberty has won numerous awards for its LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) projects, including the Environmental Protection Agency’s 2012 ENERGY STAR Partner of the Year.

Meanwhile, Fenza is helping to educate tomorrow’s architects. More than a decade ago, he joined the founding board of Philadelphia’s tuition-free Charter High School for Architecture and Design (CHAD). The school has helped more than 1,000 young people advance to higher education.

Fenza and his wife, Marcy, have endowed scholarships in Penn State’s College of Arts and Architecture to help CHAD graduates and other low-income students pay for college expenses not supported by traditional scholarships. “Some of these kids can’t even afford food and books,” he said. “They might get full tuition assistance, yet they struggle to stay in school because they have no resources for incidental expenses.”

Since 1998, Liberty and the Fenzas have co-sponsored a development class at Penn State that allows fifth-year landscape architecture students to work on real-world projects such as the Comcast Center and the Navy Yard in Philadelphia. In 2004, the University honored Fenza with an Alumni Fellow Award. He assisted in fundraising and design for the Stuckeman Family Building, the University’s first LEED building, and gifted its Willard Rouse Memorial Gallery and a faculty research

studio. He chairs the Development Committee for the College of Arts and Architecture and in 2012 was named Penn State’s Fundraising Volunteer of the Year.

The Fenzas have endowed the Carmen Fenza, Willard G. Rouse, and Charles Thorpe scholarships and have provided significant support to help the College of Arts and Architecture recruit top music students. They also established the Fenza Gaynor Endowment for Cancer Research at Penn State Hershey Medical Center in honor of their fathers, Matthew M. Fenza and Joseph Gaynor, who both died of cancer.

The Fenzas have four children: Michelle, Dylan ‘11, Erica, and Jake. Fenza is a life member of the Penn State Alumni Association.