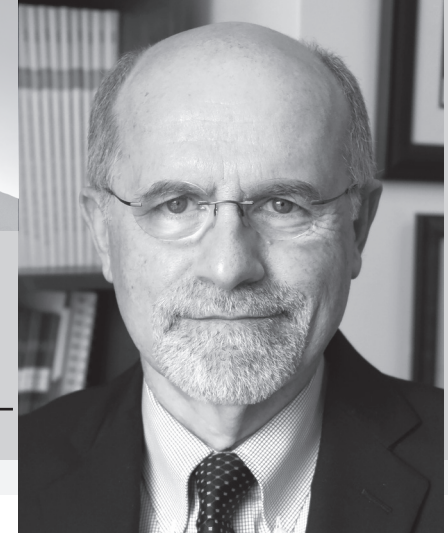


DISTINGUISHED ALUMNI AWARDS

Robert E. Hillman '74, '75g



To Robert E. Hillman for his distinguished career in speech pathology and his contributions toward improving the diagnosis and treatment of voice disorders.

Bob Hillman has made a life of pushing limits and seeking what's beyond the finish line. He arrived at Penn State in 1970 on an athletic scholarship for distance running. A member of the Penn State national record-setting four-mile relay team, he competed as a top distance runner in cross-country as well as indoor and outdoor track, working out twice a day in a nine-month-long season. He vividly recalls Penn State's square-shaped indoor practice track on the balcony at Rec Hall, always having to go away for meets during the indoor season, and forming lifelong bonds with his teammates, most notably former Olympian Greg Fredericks '72.

"I am very grateful for the distance running scholarship that made it possible for me to attend Penn State," Hillman said. He became co-captain of the cross-country team his senior year and earned the 1974 Ernest B. McCoy Award, presented annually to an outstanding Penn State senior man and woman scholar-athlete. "Getting the

award was a big surprise—I still consider it a great honor," he said.

The first in his family to graduate from college, Hillman was raised in the North Hills area of Pittsburgh. There is evidence that the Hillman family originally settled in Pittsburgh because they were given "frontier" land there as payment for fighting in the Revolutionary War; Hillman's mother's parents emigrated from Ireland.

Though he began as an English and journalism major, Hillman took a course in speech pathology that sparked the beginning of his life's work. He continued with a Penn State master's degree, worked for a year, then followed the advice of his thesis adviser, Professor Emeritus Harvey Gilbert, to pursue a Ph.D. in speech pathology. Hillman did just that, completing his degree in 1980 at Purdue University.

He selected a road less traveled when, after 12 successful years at Boston University, he walked away from a tenured professorship to get "closer to the action" at the Massachusetts Eye and Ear Infirmary where he was recruited to start a combined clinical and research program focusing on voice disorders.

"Giving up tenure was considered a very risky move," Hillman said. "My colleagues at B.U. thought I was crazy. But I'm glad I made that decision."

Hillman has remained for almost 24 years in a medical setting in close partnership with world-renowned laryngeal surgeon Steve Zeitels. He is co-director (along with Zeitels) and research director of the Center for Laryngeal Surgery and Voice Rehabilitation (the Voice Center) at Massachusetts General Hospital, overseeing a multidisciplinary group of research scientists and physicians who develop innovative approaches for improving the diagnosis and treatment of voice disorders. "It's been a very effective partnership," Hillman said.

Hillman has led research teams that developed the first voice neuroprosthesis for laryngectomy patients and the first commercially available ambulatory voice monitoring and biofeedback system for diagnosing and treating common voice disorders. Together he and Zeitels have led multi-institutional research efforts that are producing bio-implants to restore voice and speech to patients whose vocal cords are damaged by trauma or disease, and new medical devices for returning function to paralyzed vocal cords. Much

of their work has been funded by a non-profit organization called the Voice Health Institute that was established by their patients, including its honorary Chairperson Julie Andrews.

Hillman continues to teach, as professor of surgery and health sciences and technology at Harvard Medical School and MIT, and is director of Research Programs at the MGH Institute of Health Professions. He has written more than 120 publications, been awarded more than 25 research grants from governmental and private sources, and garnered 10 major awards related to his research. Hillman was a 2008 Penn State Alumni Fellow, and in 2011, he presented a talk on voice restoration as part of the Penn State Distinguished Alumni Speaker Series, sponsored by the College of Health and Human Development.

A life member of the Penn State Alumni Association, Hillman and his wife, Sheila McElwee, live in Weston, Mass. They have three children: Sarah, Jonathan, and Ali.