Wilkes University
Commencement, September 3, 1998
Citation for the Honorary Degree of Doctor of Humane Letters

EDWARD SCHECHTER

Edward Schechter, you were born and schooled in New York City at the Ethical Culture School and at DeWitt Clinton High School. You also attended the International School in Switzerland for a year in the early 1930s when the madness in Germany surfaced that would help provoke World War II. You started Dartmouth College at age sixteen and graduated in 1940. Two months before completing a graduate business degree from Harvard, you quit and volunteered for the 87th Mountain Infantry, a unit including your ski coach and many of your fellow skiers at Dartmouth. During practice maneuvers to invade the Aleutians, you led your men through freezing waters and contracted a severe case of pneumonia. While on sick leave, you married your sweetheart, Betty, and were transferred first to an Intelligence Unit in Maryland, and then into Photo Interpretation in the 41st Infantry Division, serving in the Pacific Theatre. You were among the first U.S. occupation troops in Hiroshima in October 1945.

You returned to America and a business career in the steel industry, coming to Wilkes-Barre in 1953 as President of Stress Steel, during the next quarter century creating a large number of lucrative jobs in the Valley.

From your perspective as a business leader and your passion as a citizen humanist, true to your Dartmouth education, you became deeply involved in the future of the Wyoming Valley, starting as a Board member and Executive Committee member of the Greater Wilkes-Barre Chamber of Commerce as well as of the United Way Board of Directors. You chaired the Chamber's Transportation Committee and in the 1960s became a key planner for what we know today as the Cross Valley Expressway. You pursued these transportation interests in your role as a member of the Flood Recovery Task Force after Hurricane Agnes in 1972 and became a founder and original member of the Board of Directors of the Luzerne County Transportation Authority. This leadership broadened to the state level and you became Chairman of the Pennsylvania Transportation Advisory Committee.

When you retired from an active business career in 1980, you deepened your active community role and addressed the urgent need for new leadership and planning to stimulate economic development. You were a founding member of Leadership Wilkes-Barre, an organization preparing future leaders for our community, and of the Committee for Economic Growth, the engine that got the Valley's economy moving again in the 1980s. Indeed, you became CEO's first Executive Director and helped turn it and its partner organizations, the Wilkes-Barre Industrial Fund and the Greater Wilkes-Barre Partnership, into the force for renewal and progress in the Wyoming Valley they have become now under the name of the Greater Wilkes-Barre Chamber of Business and Industry. After retiring as Executive Director of the CEG and serving as an active consultant to many local organizations, you joined in the mid-1990s the Board of the Earth Conservancy, helping to start the process of reintegrating nearly 17,000 acres of the old Blue Coal lands into the life of Luzerne County. You had tried unsuccessfully to rescue these vital but badly scarred lands out of bankruptcy during your CEG days, so it was particularly appropriate that you chaired the Land Use Planning Committee of the Earth Conservancy to lead a successful community planning process focused on how best to utilize the Earth Conservancy lands, which constitute three percent of Luzerne County. Through your plan, 10,000 acres have been reserved for recreation and to remain in their natural state, thus helping to bequeath a great natural legacy to future generations, even as the mixed use industrial/commercial/residential parcels incorporated in the plan will bring new jobs and new prosperity to the area.

Many of the ideas referred to above that you acted upon as a volunteer came out of the weekly breakfasts over forty years of a group known as the JETTs, standing for the first names of this partnership in creativity: Jack Conyngham, Ed Schechter, Tom Kiley, and Tom Bigler. Since
Tom Kiley's death, Senator Charlie Lemmond has joined the group. This camaraderie of citizens-who disagree politically with each other on almost everything-is in the best tradition of the Athenian polis or city state. Your friendships and constant conversations over the decades have helped generate the ideas that have given direction to our Valley over the last four decades of the 20th century. Your indefatigable energies, despite physical difficulties, your cheerful if acerbic wit and wisdom, your laser-like intelligence and fairness, your total devotion as husband, father and grandfather-and citizen-are worthy of emulation. In recognition of this life of service it is a proud moment for me, by virtue of the power vested in me by the Board of Trustees of Wilkes University and by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, to bestow upon you, Edward Schechter, the degree Doctor of Humane Letters, Honoris Causa, with all the rights and privileges appertaining thereto.