

URI 50th Anniversary Plaque Presentation

By Leslie A. Feil, Ph.D. – RIPA President

Tonight we are celebrating 50 years of the Department of Psychology at the University of Rhode Island. My name is Leslie Feil. I have never been either a student or faculty member at URI. I come to you as President of the Rhode Island Psychological Association to bask in your glory for a moment.

As I have learned, mostly from Peter Merenda, the history of URI's Psych Dept is closely entwined with the history of RIPA. Many of us are too young to remember what the landscape was like for psychology in Rhode Island 50 plus years ago. Once upon a time there was no URI Psych Department, there was no licensing law for psychologists in the state, and there was no professional organization of psychologists. According to the history record compiled by Harold Musiker and Peter Merenda, in 1953 there were only 3 clinical psychologists in Rhode Island. There was of course a Psychology Department at Brown but none at URI, where Psychology was combined with the Education Department.

RIPA formed largely as a result of a felt need to respond "in one voice" to the claims that Herbert Miles Jenkins was making at MIT in the early 50's about the alleged limited intellectual capacity of blacks and other minorities. As they wrote a letter to the editor of the Providence Journal to rebut Jenkins' claims, a group of psychologists formed RIPA in 1954 with Harold Musiker as their first president.

The pivotal issue of the late 50's and 60's was development of a licensing law in Rhode Island for psychologists. The concept of a licensing law in RI was first conceived in 1959 but foundered because of objections from multiple sources, some expected and some not so expected. According to Peter and Hal, the expected objections by psychiatry were heard, with active lobbying against the bill. But objections were also heard from psychologists in the state, most of whom had only bachelors or a few with masters degrees, because the proposed law professionalized psychology and required that the psychology license be reserved for those with a Ph.D. It took 10 long years of fighting, until 1969, when the licensing law finally passed and took effect. The license numbers 1, 2, and 3 for those first licensed psychologists were given to Harold Musiker, William McGurk, and Peter Merenda, all associated with University of Rhode Island. Along the way in August of

1960, the URI Board of Trustees issued an edict separating the Department of Psychology from the Department of Education, birthing your department.

Many of the RIPA members from the 50's were faculty at URI, in addition to Peter, included Ken Carpenter, Marji Ehmer, Raymond Kenney, Russell Smart, and Molly Smart from the Kingston campus. Through more than 50 years we have been fortunate to have had leadership at RIPA from URI folks. Just a few include Al and Bernice Lott, Larry Grebstein, Al Berman, Pat Raymond, Kat Quina, Tom Comiskey, Jim Campbell, Gerry Champagne, Peter Monti, and Marshall Robinson. We are grateful for their leadership and their support.

In recognition of their substantial contributions to RIPA, Harold Musiker and Peter Merenda were honored with the naming of our singular yearly honor: the Musiker-Merenda Award, granted for distinguished contributions to mental health care and psychology. The award is named after Harold Musiker and Peter Merenda, who are considered the founding fathers of professional psychology in Rhode Island.

Here's to the next 50 years of your Department and of participation by URI faculty, students, and staff with the Rhode Island Psychological Association. We look forward to many more years of collaboration and involvement.

So, Peter I want to present this plaque to you and the URI Department of Psychology, which is inscribed (with the URI 50th anniversary logo and the RIPA logo):

The Rhode Island Psychological Association presents this award to the University of Rhode Island's Department of Psychology in honor of their 50th Anniversary.

We recognize the role of the faculty, students and staff of the Department of Psychology in undergraduate and graduate education, psychological research, clinical services, community involvement, and in the formation and leadership of RIPA.

Congratulations to you all!