

## **Tau Beta Pi Announces Dr. Thomas C. Sheahan, P.E., as 2007 McDonald Mentor**

Tau Beta Pi, the engineering honor society, has named its inaugural McDonald Mentor in a newly created program to celebrate excellence in mentoring and advising among Tau Beta Pi educators and engineers who have consistently supported the personal and professional development of their students and colleagues. While the primary goal of Tau Beta Pi is to recognize students of superior scholarship and exemplary character and to honor eminent practicing engineers, the Association also lauds excellence in engineering education and in the ethical practice of engineering.

**Dr. Thomas C. Sheahan, P.E.**, *New York Mu '81*, professor in the department of civil and environmental engineering at Northeastern University, is the *2007 Tau Beta Pi McDonald Mentor*. He will be honored on October 13, 2007, at the 102nd annual national Convention to be held in Dearborn, Michigan. Tau Beta Pi President Dr. Larry A. Simonson, P.E., and McDonald Award co-founder, Capers W. McDonald, *North Carolina Gamma '74*, will present \$1,000 and an engraved medallion to Dr. Sheahan. Another \$1,000 grant will be presented to the Massachusetts Epsilon Chapter of Tau Beta Pi at Northeastern.

Established in 2005 by Marion and Capers W. McDonald and the Association, the McDonald Mentor award recognizes engineering educators or professionals in industry, government, or service organizations who have shown true concern for the individual, supporting an environment for developing talents, and who have earned respect and recognition for their contributions to their field and to the greater community.

An excellent teacher and advisor, Dr. Sheahan was cited by students and peers for his years of consistently positive interactions with students and for his work to encourage them to reach their full potential, all of which have established him as an invigorating role model for students, faculty, and advisory peers.

Dr. Sheahan completed his bachelor's degree in civil engineering in 1981 from Union College, where he was inducted into Tau Beta Pi. After serving as a Navy Civil Engineer Corps officer for five years, he received his M.S. and Sc.D. degrees in geotechnical engineering from MIT. Dr. Sheahan joined the faculty at Northeastern University in 1991 and also serves as the undergraduate program director and acting chair of the department of civil and environmental engineering. Over the past 16 years he has made diverse contributions to the engineering community as a mentor, educator, and professional.

His dean confirms Dr. Sheahan's extreme popularity among students, both as a role model and as a mentor. His commitment to developing talent is well-known. From 1993 to 2002, he was the Chief Faculty Advisor to Northeastern's chapter of Tau Beta Pi. When the Chief Advisor of the Massachusetts Epsilon Chapter had to step aside, Dr. Sheahan, the most junior of the advisors, stepped in. He did an outstanding job of teaching the students about leadership and invigorated the entire chapter. Since 2001, he has served as co-advisor for Northeastern's nationally recognized chapter of the American Society of Civil Engineers. Through such programs as the national steel bridge competition and concrete canoe competition, this organization draws students into mentoring relationships with faculty advisors. The chapter remains one of the most active and most honored chapters of that organization, receiving three national outstanding community service awards. Dr. Sheahan is also the inaugural advisor for Northeastern's newly formed chapter of Engineers Without Borders, which employs mentoring as the vehicle for involving students in social, economic, political, ethical, and cultural issues in developing countries.

As the undergraduate faculty advisor in civil and environmental engineering, Dr. Sheahan supported individual talent in multiple ways, having personally advised 250 to 300 undergraduates. He chairs the departmental awards committee which provides \$35,000 in awards annually and has participated in summer orientation sessions for incoming first year students. He has supervised 18 graduate students and engaged 11 undergraduate students in his research work, two of whom went on to receive National Science Foundation graduate fellowships.

Dr. Sheahan has earned the respect of his colleagues and attained national recognition as a mentor. His *Dear Jonas* advice column for instructors, founded in 1999, garnered a Bright Idea award from the Professional Organizational and Development Network in Higher Education in 2001. Years of online advice was compiled and published in 2004 as *Chalk Talk: E-advice from Jonas Chalk*. Other campus contributions include the implementation of an online assessment system for faculty to review and improve curriculum teaching and leading annual retreats on the assessment process. Dr. Sheahan wrote a piece titled "Becoming a Sophomore," which is presented to all first year civil engineering students at Northeastern. He also served for several years as a member of the GE Master Teacher Team, created to foster improved student experiences across colleges of engineering and arts and sciences.

An active researcher, Dr. Sheahan has published widely in his technical area of geotechnical engineering, and has presented work on engineering education and education technology. He is the co-editor of the ASTM *Geotechnical Testing Journal*, providing guidance to authors regarding publication of journal articles. He serves on a number of national committees in his technical area, and is the chair of the Transportation Research Board Committee AFS20, soils and rock instrumentation. Dr. Sheahan is the education director for a National Science Foundation project involving undergraduate research and outreach.

As one colleague remarked, Dr. Sheahan's work on campus, both job-related and volunteer, and his respect and support of students and fellow faculty embodies the ideal of professor as mentor. For his contributions to the personal growth of students and student groups, fellow faculty, and engineering education, Dr. Thomas Sheahan is the 2007 Tau Beta Pi-McDonald Mentor.

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**Tau Beta Pi, the world's largest engineering society, has initiated 492,000 members since it was founded in 1885. Headquartered in Knoxville, Tennessee, the Association has 232 active collegiate chapters and 16 active alumnus chapters throughout the country.**