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Hanover, WPI honored for promoting education

Consortium presents First George I. Alden Awards

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WORCESTER — Mechanics Hall was jammed yesterday with academic and community leaders as the Colleges of Worcester Consortium presented the first George I. Alden Awards for excellence in higher education and education access.

The Hanover Insurance Group received the community-based higher education access award and the Worcester Community Project Center at WPI won the campus-based educational excellence award.

While the consortium was giving out good news to the winners, the alliance of 13 area colleges was also the recipient of good news last night. Lt. Gov. Timothy P. Murray, the featured speaker, announced a \$125,000 grant to the consortium from the Massachusetts Office of Travel and Tourism to promote “educational tourism” – the patronizing of Worcester hospitalities and attractions by people who are in the area for the college.

Mr. Murray, former mayor of Worcester, also reminded the crowd of the Patrick administration's proposal to increase the budget for state colleges by 3.7 percent, community colleges by 5.1 percent, and the University of Massachusetts by 4.1 percent – despite the state's \$3.1 billion deficit.

Hanover CEO Fred Eppinger accepted the access award for Hanover, which has pledged \$200,000 for the Advancement Via Individual Determination program at Burncoat Middle and High schools. The company's foundation also has supported Junior Achievement and JA Academy for years, with more than 50 Hanover employees teaching Junior Achievement curriculum in more than 100 Worcester public school classrooms in the last year alone.

The access award is given for efforts to “open the doors to higher education for a non-traditional population” and for advocacy on behalf of disadvantaged or underrepresented students at the middle-secondary level and post-secondary level.

WPI president and CEO Dennis D. Berkey accepted the excellence award for WPI. Susan C. Wyckoff, the consortium's vice president for academic affairs, noted that since WPI established its community project center in 2000, 70,000 student hours and 3,000 faculty hours have been devoted to professional-level solutions to problems identified by municipal government and school officials and cultural and educational groups in the city.