



Ida and Joseph Simenas Physics Scholarship
University of Massachusetts Amherst Department of Physics
Biographical Information,
by Scott Simenas, (BS/Physics, UMass, 1971)

The Ida and Joseph Simenas Physics Scholarship is named for the parents of Scott Joseph Simenas, UMass Class of 1971, Physics Major. This biography describes their lives and, we hope, will serve as an inspiration for other UMass students and graduates, including the winners of the Simenas Scholarship.

Ida Barbara Simenas and Joseph Simenas Jr. were the children of immigrants and the first in their families to graduate from high school.

Ida (DeCarolus) Simenas was born on January 1, 1923 in Leominster Massachusetts, the daughter of Italian immigrants, John and Jenny (Fantozzi) DeCarolus. Ida was the middle child in a family of seven children (5 girls and 2 boys). She was an extrovert who at a young age formed a show biz act with her sister Rose. Ida would sing and dance while Rose accompanied her on the piano. From the start Ida was an academic star, winning public speaking and essay writing contests. She was elected multiple times to the Student Council, Class Secretary, and Class Treasurer offices. She acted in the school plays, organized class dances, wrote for the school paper and edited the yearbook. While in high school she worked as secretary at Tru-Grip Combs Company for 25 cents an hour. She graduated from Leominster High School in 1941, class valedictorian. Ida was also selected the Best Dressed, which she won by combining a good sense for fashion gleaned from movie magazines and hand me downs from her two older sisters.



Ida DeCarolus Becker,
Junior College, 1943

Joseph Simenas Jr. was born on June 26, 1918 in Gardner, Massachusetts, the son of Lithuanian immigrants, Joseph Simenas and Amelia (Shlakis) Simenas. Joseph was the eldest of three children (2 boys and 1 girl). As a boy he was always working to help support the family by delivering newspapers, working on neighborhood farms, and selling pelts obtained from trapping. Young Joseph fancied himself a frontiersman like a character from James Fenimore Cooper novel. While in high school, Joseph worked at the Heywood Wakefield Furniture Company. He graduated from Gardner High School in 1937.



Joseph Simenas Jr.,
Wentworth Institute, 1939

After high school Ida (DeCarolus) Simenas attended Becker Junior College in Worcester where she had dreams of becoming a writer. Once again she was an academic star, editing the school newspaper, co-editing the yearbook, and joining the business sorority Beta Chi Sigma. Her classmates remembered her as a “magnetic personality and vivid beauty that impressed all her acquaintances.” Majoring in Commercial Journalism, she graduated in 1943 with class superlatives for Girl Most Likely to Succeed, Most Dependable Girl, Girl Done Most for Class, Cleverest Girl, and again Best Dressed Girl. She so impressed the Becker Junior College President that he hired her for his secretary after graduation at \$25 per week. She quickly moved on and achieved her goal to work in New York City, obtaining job with radio station WHN for \$50 per week. Her duties at WHN included recruiting advertisers and writing ad copy and jingles for on air broadcast. She was well on her way to a successful career

in radio when the tragic death of her brother, Frank, in World War II prompted her return to her family in Leominster.

Joseph Simenas wanted to be a world adventurer like his idol Lowell Thomas, but first he attended Wentworth Institute in Boston. Majoring in Building Construction, he graduated in 1939 with classmates remembering him as a “good conversationalist that can debate on most any subject.” After graduation he worked as construction foremen, traveling up and down the East Coast building the military bases, air-fields, and supply depots that would be needed for the coming World War. In March 1941, he enlisted in the United States Army Air Corp, predecessor to the United States Air Force. Joseph served with distinction as Technical Sergeant in the China Burma India Theatre of the War. His unit serviced and repaired the aircraft that flew the Hump, the Eastern end of the Himalayan Mountains, in order to supply the Chinese war effort. And on one occasion Joseph accompanied an air crew on a flight, something Lowell Thomas never experienced. Driven by his curiosity about how things worked, Joseph mastered mechanical tasks and was able to fix just about anything. He was awarded the Good Conduct Medal, American Defense Service Medal, and the Asia Pacific Ribbon with 2 Service Stars. He was de-commissioned from the United States Army Air Corp in October, 1945 at Camp Edwards, Cape Cod.

In August 1946, Ida and Joseph met at the Whalom Park Ballroom in Lunenburg, Massachusetts. According to Ida, Joseph told her he was “going to marry her one day.” According to Ida’s sister, Madeline, Ida said “Joseph was the handsomest man she had ever met.” In a whirlwind courtship they were engaged on New Year’s Day 1947, married in April 1947 and honey mooned at Niagara Falls. Ida and Joseph started their life together in a \$30 per month apartment on 15 Rich Street, Gardner, Massachusetts. Ida and Joseph were soon blessed with children, son Scott in 1949 followed by daughter Sally in 1951. The family moved to a house built by Joseph on 15 Shady Avenue, Westminster in 1951. Joseph with Ida’s assistance founded the contracting business and building supplier, New England Lumber Company.

Ida returned to work soon after Sally and Scott were of school age. She worked as secretary for the Principal of the Ashburnham and Westminster School District, followed by secretary for the President of Stevens Business College, Fitchburg. During this period she also attended evening college classes to obtain her degree. She graduated from Clark University, Worcester in 1967 with a degree in Business Administration. After earning her degree Ida achieved her goal of becoming a business college teacher at Stevens Business College, Fitchburg. Her last employment as business college teacher was at Salter Secretarial School, Worcester.

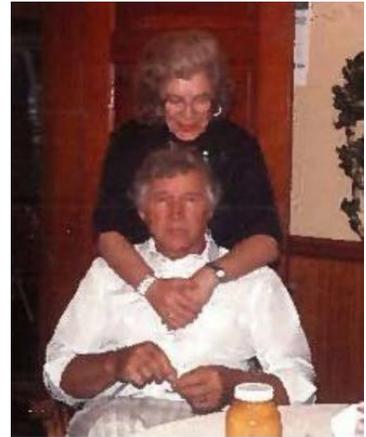


Ida & Joseph, Bermuda, 1956

After 15 years running New England Lumber Company, Joseph returned to his real interest building things. Joseph worked as site foreman for Pitco Construction, Webster building pre-fabricated metal warehouses. Bechtel Corporation in San Francisco employed Joseph as a civil engineer. While at Bechtel, Joseph worked on the Pilgrim Nuclear Power Plant, Plymouth and Calvert Cliffs Nuclear Power Plant, Lusby, Maryland. In his last employment with AirTeck Corporation, Newton, he supervised construction of metal fabricated chimneys designed to meet air pollution standards. Joseph erected these chimneys in 38 States and 3 Canadian

Provinces. The most famous was the 138 foot baseball bat shaped chimney installed at Yankee Stadium in the Bronx.

After years of employment, both Ida and Joseph retired in 1978. In retirement, one of their proudest accomplishments was the purchase and restoration of an 1871 Gingerbread Style Cape Cod home. Ida loved to read, travel, cook, entertain, and mentor her many nieces, nephews, and two grandchildren, Hunter Hopkins and Ryan Hopkins. On the 100th anniversary of Leominster High School in 2009, Ida was honored as one of its top ten highest ranking students. Joseph, a voracious reader of newspapers and National Geographic Magazine, enjoyed gardening, bicycling, handyman home repair, and travel. Joseph pre-deceased Ida at age 82 in May 2001. Ida passed away at age 91 in June 2015. Both are buried in the Veterans National Cemetery, Bourne, Massachusetts.



Ida & Joseph, 1998

It is hoped that the recipients of this scholarship going forward in their careers are hard working, resilient in the face of adversity, able to collaborate with all kinds of people, and enthusiastic with a positive attitude like those of Ida and Joseph.