THE MARTIN C. AND PATTY JISCHKE Purdue Opportunity Award:
Michael J. McCormick, the First Jischke Scholar

It is always in style to show one’s appreciation for recognition and acts of generosity! But when the recipients are the retiring president and first lady of a world-class research university, what gift would not become next year’s contribution to a White Elephant gift exchange? That was the challenge of the officers of PURA when President and Mrs. Jischke announced they were retiring and becoming members of the Purdue University Retirees Association. How could we say ‘thank you’ to them in a tangible way with a gift that would make a difference? Who once recommended that we give nothing that has to be fed, dusted, or painted? Excellent advice but it limited our choices.

During his tenure, President Jischke was a strong proponent of additional donor funds for scholarships and initiated the Purdue Opportunity Awards (POA) for income-eligible Twenty-first Century Scholars from Indiana. These students agree to participate in the Purdue Promise support program for the next four years – they must maintain at least a C+ GPA, complete a minimum of 30 credit hours each academic year, and participate in programs that improve study skills and academic discipline. PURA’s retirement gift to President and Mrs. Jischke was a POA named for them; individual members made contributions to this endowed scholarship to guarantee its availability indefinitely. In addition, Fidelity Investments made a $5,000 gift to the scholarship in recognition of its new role helping Purdue employees plan for retirement. Finally, in 2012, a Martin C. and Patty Jischke POA was part of the financial aid package offered to Michael J. McCormick, a beginning student at Purdue – Michael became our first Jischke Scholar!

Michael and his parents, John and Rebecca Haram, attended the June luncheon at MCL and were introduced for the first time to PURA members. Michael had just completed his freshman year. Again, at the 2013 Fall Kickoff Luncheon, Michael was acknowledged by PURA President Bob Bain and welcomed by the large number of Purdue retirees, by President Mitch Daniels, President Emeritus Steven Beering and Mrs. Jane Beering, and Mrs. Patty Jischke.

Michael McCormick will continue as a Jischke Scholar throughout his undergraduate program as long as he meets the requirements of the Purdue Promise agreement and maintains good academic and citizenship standing. Who is “our” Jischke Scholar, this young man who will be part of PURA’s activities the next few years?

Michael grew up in Lebanon, IN and moved with his family to Colfax several years ago. He is the oldest of four siblings – his sister is a student at Western Boone High School, and his two younger brothers are homeschooled. A rehabbed Queen Anne farmhouse “in the middle of a cornfield” is home and the nearby Civil War-era barn was upgraded to house the family’s furniture refinishing business.

Purdue seemed like the perfect fit for Michael – being an engineer has been a long-desired career goal, his father attended Purdue, West Lafayette is “away” but not too far, and it offers an outstanding education if one is ready for it. As with many first-year students, Michael had an epiphany about the nature of “Purdue-style” engineering and whether this highly theoretical discipline was a perfect fit for his interests and talents; after two semesters, he processed a CODO, and his coursework is now directed toward a degree in Electrical Engineering Technology. So much of what one learns in college occurs outside the classroom, and Michael learned dramatically the importance of setting priorities, being organized, having the personal discipline to stay focused, and how to keep a balance between work (studying) and play (socializing). An older and wiser Michael began his sophomore year!

A secondary passion for Michael is music – he is developing his skills with a guitar, drums, and the piano. Combined with learning these instruments, he is enrolled in Introduction to Sound Systems and wants to learn more about careers in the audio industry – the technology of recording sound or a job in industry developing sound...
equipment. Owning and operating a recording studio would be the fulfillment of a life dream for Michael. His “wish list” also includes the possibility of international study and/or travel; any country would be attractive if it provides additional exploration of the interface between engineering, technology, and music. Michael is doing exactly what one should in college – exploring different intellectual and career possibilities and learning how they fit him.

The Purdue landscape offers many opportunities for students to develop essential leadership skills. This year Michael has started his leadership journey by serving as a mentor to a group of beginning students in Purdue Promise, listening to their concerns and connecting them to appropriate resources on campus. Another leadership goal is to become a group leader at his in-town church.

To test his ability to balance his schedule successfully, Michael added a part-time job to his other responsibilities -- academic commitments, time to develop his music skill, mentoring new Purdue Promise students, and time to “hang out” with friends. He is employed as an iTap Lab Assistant which allows him opportunities to meet and be helpful to other students but also to complete his homework during the slow times. PURA is betting on Michael to successfully manage this range of activities!

Within the past year, Michael has moved from knowing nothing about PURA to becoming its “star” undergraduate student – a role that might be daunting for many students. When asked what it means to be a Jischke Scholar, Michael responded:

“I love being a Jischke Scholar, not just for the vast amount of networking opportunities that I have through PURA, but also because it’s almost like I have 200 adopted grandparents. I love going to luncheons and talking with retirees about school and my life and being given endless amounts of advice and encouragement.

“Also, I feel that being a Jischke Scholar means that I have been endowed with a certain responsibility. Even more so now that I have met Mrs. Jischke. . . . I represent an investment that PURA made in me in honor of a past Purdue President and, as such, I am responsible for representing myself as a student and a person worthy of that gift.”