

**In My View,**  
Yet Another Open Letter to the RPI Community

The logo for "Renew Rensselaer" is displayed in white serif font on a red rectangular background.

The recent letter from the Chairman of the Trustees dealt a blow to one of Rensselaer's finest and longest traditions. It spoke of the Trustees and the President's vision of what the Student Union should be – it would have been nice to have asked the students for their vision.

A year after Chairman Arthur Golden graduated in 1966, students supported, in the GM / PU elections, the idea of dramatically increasing our student activities fee. This was done as part of that long tradition, with the sound logic that the just-completed Student Union Building would need a far larger operating budget to fully realize its great potential for improving campus life. It was also done to cement the tradition that the Student Union would remain in control of these funds and the supported activities. As noted just prior to this election,

*"... other schools across the country have had similar unions and their union have in many cases drifted out of student control by neglect and misuse. This is something that must not happen here at Rensselaer. The Union must have competent leaders aware of its potential and scope in order to insure that students retain full control of the facility they fought so long to obtain."* The Polytechnic, 19 April 1967, page 13.

To characterize the Union as just another experimental lab offered by the Administration subverts what has been an essential element of RPI's soul for over one and a quarter centuries. It was the students who raised the initial funds supporting athletics in 1883 that directly led to formation of this Union. Similarly,

*"In 1964, ground was broken for a new Student Union at Rensselaer. Construction of the building was made possible by the students' decision to increase the student activities fee several years earlier. By 1964, the students had accumulated over a quarter of a million dollars, which enabled Rensselaer to acquire a 30-year mortgage to finance the building's \$3 million cost. As a result of continuing student support, that mortgage was burned in 1994."* Phelan, Ross, & Westerdahl; Rensselaer: Where Imagination Achieves the Impossible.

Renew Rensselaer is a team dedicated to preserving and strengthening what has made RPI special – and to improving its governance. Our newest member is "Stephen Van Rensselaer" who secured over 3,400 signatures to "Save the Union." Why?

*"The Rensselaer Union is an unusual, if not unique, student organization. Run entirely by students, the Union is a justifiable source of pride for the Institute."* Jared Cohon, President of Carnegie Mellon University (source: 2006 Middle States Accreditation Report to RPI)

You will be hearing more from Renew Rensselaer soon – and how you can help.

Bill Criss '68 & '69G  
78<sup>th</sup> President of the Union