

## Conversation with the president

**George Webb '88, '91, is president of the Rice Engineering Alumni (REA) and a patent lawyer who works in Houston and Austin. While a student at Rice, he earned bachelor's and master's degrees in electrical engineering. Recently we had a conversation with George, asking him about the REA, its ongoing activities and his involvement in the organization:**

### ***How did you get involved in the REA?***

"I participated in REA events for many years, but I first joined the REA board in 2007. A member had resigned and I was nominated to fill the rest of his term through 2009. I was put on the Social Committee, which was a lot of fun, and the next year I became chair of it. I was asked to stay on the board to serve a full four-year term, which I'm doing now. In 2010 I had the honor of being named president-elect, and now I'm president."

### ***What do you see as the mission of the REA?***

"Our goal is to serve as a catalyst for collaboration and lifelong connections between alumni and the school. In practical terms, we do this by recognizing outstanding achievements, supporting students, and facilitating interactions among alumni, students, faculty and staff. These programs build connections that are academic and professional, as with the Oshman Engineering Design Kitchen, but also social and informal. The school and its alumni are all doing remarkable things, and it benefits all of us when each reinforces the other."

### ***What are some of your organization's recent accomplishments?***

"We are greatly expanding the REA student awards program, one of our flagship activities. In addition to the scholarships we've traditionally given for academic merit, this year we created new REA awards for student research, leadership and international service. Between those funded directly by the REA and those that are separately endowed but REA-administered, the REA now gives out \$61,000 in scholarships. This fall we're starting a program to provide grants for carefully selected student initiatives and projects outside the classroom. This idea first came from Angela Young, the school's executive director of development. We hope to begin taking applications late this fall."



### ***Any plans for changing the way the REA works?***

"We want to increase our engagement with alumni outside Houston. Historically, our board membership has drawn mainly from Houston, and most REA events have been held there. Today, of our 24 board members, four live outside the city—in San Antonio, Austin, Philadelphia and Chile. We need our most energetic alumni to serve on the board, and we want to make sure alumni throughout the world stay engaged with the REA and the school."

### ***Anything else?***

"We want to enhance our communications, especially our presence on the web and through social media. Operationally, we receive terrific support from the Alumni Affairs office, especially Associate Director Sean Harlow, and from Ann Lugg, communications director for the school. But we definitely have room to grow in making sure that our message is timely, consistent and complete in order to engage alumni most effectively."

### ***How are you getting along with the new dean of the engineering school, Ned Thomas?***

"Splendidly! Ned and I are both big baseball fans—I'm an Astros season ticket-holder, and he's a Red Sox fan from his days in Boston. It just so happened that on the night of Ned's first day at Rice, July 1, the Astros hosted the Red Sox. So Ned and I went to the game and had a great time. For the record, the Astros led most of the way, but Boston rallied in the 7th inning to win it. Now we just have to educate Ned that college baseball is really the pinnacle of the sport, so that he follows the Owls with the same passion."