beautiful DAY

Inauguration Festivities
Celebrate a New President
and Launch the Alumni
Entrepreneur Hall of Fame

by John Crawford
ON A CRISP OCTOBER WEEKEND, THE COLLEGE community came together for inauguration.

It was a time for celebration. There were marchers and music, prayers and poetry, friends and family. More than 1,400 people attended, and their applause was warm and long.

Events included a symposium discussing entrepreneurship, the renaming of the Babson Executive Conference Center dining room in honor of President Emeritus Ralph Sorenson, and a dinner saluting the first three members of the newly formed Babson Alumni Entrepreneur Hall of Fame.

And a new leader, President Len Schlesinger, was welcomed. A long winding column of robes made its way to Isbrandtsen Field, where under a tent, the air was filled with history and tradition. With five past Babson presidents sitting behind him, the very people who had built and shaped the institution, Schlesinger looked to the College’s past and how far it had come.

“There is no debate anywhere that we have moved from an institution that identified entrepreneurship as an interesting theme in 1978 to an institution of global prominence in the field,” he said.

“I believe that the world is hungering for the kind of entrepreneurial thinking and solutions that Babson can provide.”

—PRESIDENT LEN SCHLESINGER
This is a time for us to stand up and get out and do something about this country." —Jack Welch

WE WILL RALLY FROM THESE UNCERTAIN economic times. That was a message delivered by keynote speaker Jack Welch at inauguration. “We have to think about tomorrow, the good tomorrow, the great tomorrow, and not be hunkered down under a rock sucking our thumbs,” said the former CEO of General Electric Co.

He believes the spirit of students, like those at Babson, will help turn the tide. “Come out with the self-confidence you gained here,” he advised students. “You got a great education. Make sure that’s a building block for your courage and your convictions.”

Besides addressing the economy, Welch praised Len Schlesinger, who was a leader in the late 1980s and early 1990s of GE’s Work-Out, a bureaucracy-busting initiative that strived to give employees a voice in the organization. “He’s a man of action,” Welch said. “He’s a unique blend of academic and business person. But most of all, he cares.”

For educators such as Schlesinger, this is an exciting time, Welch said. Welch teaches at MIT’s Sloan School of Management, and with so many teaching moments in today’s headlines, he feels there’s much to discuss in the classroom. “With these turbulent times, we took our syllabus, and we pitched it out the window.”

From the past, he looked to the future and Babson’s place in the world. In a time of economic uncertainty and global problems such as hunger, poverty, and climate change, he talked of possibility. “Everyone is looking beyond our currently inadequate solutions for a better answer.”

Babson can help provide those answers, the new president said. He promised that the school, armed with its entrepreneurial spirit, will have an important impact on the 21st century. “Nothing less will do for me, and I hope nothing less will do for you.”

IN THE EVENING, AFTER THE POMP and circumstance of the inauguration ceremony, Babson held a dinner celebrating its entrepreneurial spirit, with the new Babson Alumni Entrepreneur Hall of Fame welcoming its three initial members.

The honored alumni were dreamers and doers with the courage to take risks and the will to add value to society. That’s not an easy task. “The life of an entrepreneur is a life of setbacks, challenges, disappointments, and failures,” said inductee Bob Davis, MBA ’85, the former Lycos president and CEO, who steered the fledging company into an Internet powerhouse.

Building a business may be challenging, but when it takes flight and all the pieces come together, entrepreneurship can be a great ride. “There were so many ups and downs and thrills,” said Davis, now managing general partner at Highland Capital Partners, a venture capital firm.

Entrepreneurs can reach dizzying heights, but they start at the bottom, hustling and hoping. He may be a social entrepreneur now, but inductee Jon Carson ’79 first got his entrepreneurial feet wet by running a keg delivery business as a Babson student. The venture, which he called the “ultimate demand-driven business,” taught him important lessons.

“It was kind of like boot camp,” Carson
“We can choose to make the world a better place.”

—DEBORAH DISANZO, MBA ’89

said. “There was a level of confidence that came with it.” His days of keg delivering behind him, Carson is chairman and CEO of cMarket Network, a provider of online auction services for nonprofits. Prior to that, he was cofounder of Family Education Network, which helped school systems build Web sites.

Inductee Deborah DiSanzo, MBA ’89, is CEO of Philips Healthcare Informatics and, years earlier, was instrumental in launching a home defibrillator device. When she was a young executive, DiSanzo focused on sales, market, and profit. That changed when she met Bridgette McDonald.

A flight attendant, McDonald liked to run and garden. “She was thin and she was beautiful,” DiSanzo said. “Bridgette was the last person in the world you would think would suffer from a cardiac arrest.” The unthinkable happened to the 40-year-old McDonald on a 1999 flight. Luckily, a defibrillator, the very device that DiSanzo was launching, was on the plane. It saved McDonald’s life.

The two women later met. “I was dead, and now I’m alive, thanks to what you do,” McDonald told DiSanzo. “I get to hug my two young children and smell the flowers in my garden.” From that moment on, DiSanzo had a new outlook. “I have never forgotten that what I do makes a difference.”