This year’s recipient of the RMC Alumni Association Outstanding Service Award is Robert S. FitzGerald, known to all simply as “Fitz.”

Fitz was recognized at last year’s Candlelight because he was officially retiring as the director of major gifts, a position he held for five years, and one in which he excelled. During Fitz’s five years in that position, record fund raising helped revitalize the College finances. When he accepted that position, in conjunction with his good friend and another outstanding Rocky alumnus, Rusty Harper, the two of them were a team that helped Rocky emerge from a serious financial crisis.

It was not the first time Fitz came to the rescue of his alma mater. After ten years performing out of Hollywood as the People Tree, with and for such luminaries as Joey Bishop, Johnny Carson, Dean Martin, Sonny & Cher, Lily Tomlin, and Ricky Nelson, among others, in 1975 he accepted a challenge to help recruit students. Enrollment had severely dwindled. Teamed with Rusty Harper and two brothers Tim and Steve Holmes, who are also alumni, and some other Rocky grads, they formed a singing group called The Rocky Road Show that performed at high school assemblies across Montana, Wyoming and Washington. Enrollment soared by 70 percent from their efforts.

In 1977-8 Fitz was the campaign manager for Max Baucus’ winning bid for US Senate.

In the 1980s, the nucleus of that performing group had evolved into The Montana Logging and Ballet Company with Fitz, Rusty, Tim and Steve. A singing, joke slinging and slapstick political satire quartet, the group performed to hundreds of audiences all across the US. They returned to their Montana roots, although still touring to perform across the U.S. Notably, in 1987, they performed at the first United Methodist Church Global Gathering and met Nobel Peace Prize Laureate, Archbishop Desmond Tutu. Later they persuaded him to come to Montana where they held a benefit concert to raise awareness of racist apartheid and to raise scholarships for black African and Native American students. Four
thousand people attended; almost a million dollars was raised.

Fitz and his fellow alumni showed what it meant to be a Rocky grad – someone who served his community and church as well as his career.

“You can follow your heart’s song at Rocky -- the teachers coax out of students what they don’t even know is there. This is how Rocky not only educates, it transforms lives,” Fitz says, describing his devotion to his alma mater.

That devotion makes him proud that in 1984, he was asked to be the RMC Commencement speaker; in 1990, he was asked to serve on the RMC National Advisory Council where served until 2004 when he joined the RMC Development Department. Every decade since he arrived here as a freshman, Fitz has played a role in the life of the College.

Even when he announced his retirement last year, he made it clear that he would never end his relationships with his beloved college.

“I’ll be thanking tons of people who have supported Rocky and I’ll still be trying to spread the word,” he said.

And this year, he actually agreed to put retirement aside to help train new development staff. If they learned their lessons well, they will exceed Fitz’s fund raising records.

“That will make me very happy,” Fitz said. “It means raising more money to help more students enjoy the absolutely life changing experience of this place.”