When 19-year-old Willard Hackerman set out for one of his first engineering jobs, the entire staff of The Whiting-Turner Contracting Company—all three of them—packed up and moved from Baltimore to Cambridge, Maryland, to build an $187,000 drawbridge. “We were lucky to get it,” Hackerman says of the job.

It was 1938. Fresh out of the School of Engineering at The Johns Hopkins University, Hackerman was drawing a salary of $35 a week. Today, the alumnus is the president, CEO, and sole stockholder of The Whiting-Turner Contracting Company, one of the nation’s largest building contracting companies with some 1,000 engineers in 23 offices around the country. Work is no longer scarce. These days, he says, the Maryland-based company has a $4 billion project backlog.

Over the past almost seven decades, five of them under Hackerman’s leadership, Whiting-Turner’s portfolio has expanded from bridges to include some of America’s most prominent shopping malls, elegant embassies, high-tech cleanrooms, and well-known landmarks. In Baltimore, these projects include the National Aquarium, M&T Bank Stadium, the Meyerhoff Symphony Hall, and Harborplace. At the Homewood campus, Whiting-Turner is managing construction for the Decker Quadrangle (see page 12). The company also has erected the Bloomberg Center and the Ralph S. O’Connor Recreation Center, renovated Homewood Apartments, and has built or remodeled many other projects at Hopkins.

While Hackerman’s leadership extends beyond the business world, in his hometown, he also is known as a philanthropist dedicated to higher education and the arts. He traces it all back to his engineering background. “Engineers are problem solvers,” he says. “They have the attitude, the training, and the ability to solve problems.”

The only child of a homemaker and a factory manager, Hackerman grew up in Baltimore’s Forest Park neighborhood. At Baltimore Polytechnic Institute, a public high school known for its engineering program, Hackerman took the courses to enter a university engineering program at an advanced level. After graduating from Poly in 1935 at age 16, Hackerman enrolled at Hopkins, where he convinced the registrar to let him pay the $450 annual tuition in monthly installments.

At age 19, Hackerman had a Hopkins degree in Civil Engineering. Soon Hopkins called, looking for Engineering graduates who could interview at Whiting-Turner. Hackerman was hired. For years, he worked under G.W.C. Whiting, the company’s co-founder who had begun the business in 1909 with LeBaron Turner, a classmate from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Whiting in 1910 bought out his partner and led the company until 1955, when he chose the 37-year-old Hackerman to succeed him.

Hackerman still beams as he talks about that bridge he built in Cambridge. Business was tough back then, he says. The company was small—just Hackerman,
“Engineers have the attitude, the training, and the ability to solve problems.”

—Willard Hackerman ’38

Whiting, and a third engineer. They handled one project at a time, when they could find work, all pitching in on-site. “I worked with my hands for the better part of 12 years,” Hackerman says.

These days, Hackerman, 87, still works directly on some of Whiting-Turner’s projects and also develops real estate. He is now involved in the Metro Center at Owings Mills, a $220-million mixed-use site that will include a community college building, public library, restaurants, retail and office space, apartments, and a hotel.

As Whiting-Turner continues to grow and take on more high-profile projects, Hackerman still draws deeply from the lessons of his mentor, whose oil portrait is displayed near his desk in his spacious Towson office.

Hackerman credits the firm’s success to Whiting’s strategy of hiring engineers to fill as many company roles as possible, including project managers and supervisors. He believes Whiting-Turner employs more engineers than any other company of its size, and was the first to use engineers in construction. “That is the main reason the company is what it is,” Hackerman says. “All the leaders are engineers.”

Whiting-Turner’s staff includes many Hopkins engineers, says Hackerman.

Now a Hopkins trustee emeritus, he served the university for nearly 40 years and led the effort to re-establish the School of Engineering in 1979. Hackerman was instrumental in seeing that half of his mentor’s estate went to Engineering after Whiting died in 1974. The new school was named in Whiting’s memory. Margaret Whiting, after her husband’s death, also endowed the Willard and Lillian Hackerman Chair in Civil Engineering.

Since then, Hackerman has supported the Whiting School in many ways, most recently with a $5 million commitment, recognized in the naming of the Hackerman Scholars to bring more students from Poly to study at Hopkins. The gift “assures we’re attracting exceptional individuals who live right here in our city,” noted Nicholas P. Jones, dean of the Whiting School. In addition, undergraduate Engineering students benefit from the Hackerman Engineering Student Loan Fund that had been created by the couple.

At Hopkins, the Hackerman name is a familiar one across the institution. In the School of Medicine, the couple endowed the Willard and Lillian Hackerman Chair in Radiation Oncology. Another gift helped create the Hackerman-Patz Patient and Family Pavilion at the Sidney Kimmel Comprehensive Cancer Center, a 50-guest residence that serves patients undergoing cancer treatment and their families.

“Will’s vision and generosity have made an immeasurable contribution to the success of the Whiting School and to all of Johns Hopkins,” noted William R. Brody, University president. “We are tremendously grateful for all he has done for Hopkins, and especially proud to count him as one of our own.”

The construction executive’s wide-ranging civic endeavors extend well beyond Hopkins. Hackerman served on Maryland’s first economic development council and first higher education commission, and sits on the boards of the University of Maryland School of Medicine, the Maryland Science Center, and the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra. As dedicated patrons of the arts, the Hackermans purchased a 19th-century Mt. Vernon Place mansion for $800,000 in 1984 and promptly turned it over to the Walters Art Gallery. Now called the Hackerman House, it is home to the Walters Art Museum’s Asian art collection.

As he sits in his office, 67 years after that three-man firm built a drawbridge, Willard Hackerman is satisfied, but still forward-focused. “I’m working harder now than I ever did in my life,” he says with...
Made-to-Order for Maryland

For Aris Melissaratos ’66, experience as a Westinghouse executive, an entrepreneur, and a community advocate have all helped prepare him for his latest role: leading the state’s economic development.

By Billie Walker

“This is the perfect job to cap my career,” said Aris Melissaratos ’66, who since January 2003 has taken charge as secretary of Maryland’s Department of Business and Economic Development. He heads an impressive array of aggressive initiatives to strengthen the state’s economy and its attractiveness to all sectors, especially business, industry, research, technology, trade, film, the arts, and tourism.

“Maryland has everything!” Melissaratos says with a certain degree of pride. “We have the infrastructure, the skilled workforce, the research and educational institutions, and the entrepreneurial drive to complete in today’s global marketplace. Our strategy for a successful Maryland economy has focused on the transformation from the old manufacturing economy to the knowledge-based economy.”

This successful strategy is reflected in the economic growth and stability that Maryland has experienced over the last few years. During his tenure as secretary of Business Development, Maryland has added 50,000 jobs a year, and stands to add more than 10,000 new jobs through the recently announced national consolidation of military facilities.

One of Maryland’s greatest strengths, Melissaratos points out, is the state’s intellectual resources, among them more than 50 major federal research labs and an additional 150 research centers. “Maryland has so much intellectual horsepower!” he says. “We are continually enhancing our image as a research state, a knowledge economy. And Johns Hopkins plays a significant role in that picture.”

A review of his career suggests that Melissaratos might have been preparing for this position all his life. At Johns Hopkins, he earned his bachelor’s degree in Electrical Engineering in 1966. “Hopkins gave me a good, sound, fundamental education, strengthening my thought processes,” he relates. “It gave me the ability to make right assumptions and calculations so important in decision-making. This training was invaluable.”

He earned a master’s degree in engineering management from George Washington University, and later completed Harvard University’s Program for Management Development. He also has...
finished coursework toward a doctorate in international politics at the Catholic University of America.

In 1997, Melissaratos retired from Westinghouse, where in his 32 years he was instrumental in shaping its national leadership in defense electronics. While in Baltimore, he was vice president and general manager of the Design Engineering and Manufacturing Operations Divisions of the Baltimore Electronics Systems Group (now Northrop Grumman Electronic Systems). At corporate headquarters in Pittsburgh, he retired as vice president of science and technology and chief technology officer.

Post-retirement, he’s been equally energetic, beginning as corporate vice president for Thermo Electron Corporation in Waltham, Massachusetts, and president and CEO of Coleman Research Corporation and Thermo Coleman Corporation. To boost funding and strategic direction for high-tech start-ups, he founded Armel Private Equity Investments.

Throughout his corporate career, Melissaratos has been exceptionally active as a community advocate, which he says also prepared him well for his current role.

In Maryland, his service includes being a board member of the Greater Baltimore Alliance, the Technology Council of Maryland, and Emerging Technology Centers. He is founding co-chair of the Greater Baltimore Technology Council, past vice president of the Maryland Chamber of Commerce, past chair of the Maryland Manufacturing Association, and past member of the Board of Visitors of the University of Maryland.

Melissaratos, who has been on the Whiting School’s National Advisory Council since 1996, is pleased with the direction the School has been taking. “Each dean has moved the School a step forward,” he notes. He especially applauds Engineering’s interdisciplinary initiatives, among them the Institute for NanoBioTechnology.

Biotechnology is a far cry from the blue-collar Baltimore where Melissaratos had worked in his father’s bakery while studying at Hopkins (the family emigrated from Romania and Greece when he was 13). To help make it possible for today’s Baltimore students to study engineering, in 1999 he established the Melissaratos Family Scholarship Fund, honoring his parents. Helping students is one more way he strives to assure that Maryland’s future is a high-tech, global one.

Visit the state’s Department of Business and Economic Development at www.choosemaryland.org.