The Joseph’s Coat is bestowed annually upon a member of a post-50th Reunion class who is held in high esteem by the College and his fellow alumni. Inspired by an eye-catching specimen worn by alumni secretary Charles B. Hall of the Class of 1915, and first presented in 1952, the coat is the loudest, liveliest, flashiest available, in reference to the biblical Coat of Many Colors.

It is appropriate then that we award the coat this year to an alumnus with a wee bit of panache.

Way back when the Joseph’s Coat was first presented, this year’s honoree had already lived a very full life by most conventional standards. At Williams he was a member of the Undergraduate Council, a Junior Advisor, a three-sport athlete, star runner, and captain of the Track Team.

Following graduation, he entered the Marine Corps as a second lieutenant and served with the First Marine Division during World War II, earning four Battle Stars, two Unit Citations, and a Bronze Star. By 1952, he was well into what would become a career of more than 40 years with The Upjohn Company in Kalamazoo, Michigan.

In 1966, he was selected to deliver the alumni address at his 25th Reunion and was named a trustee of the College, a post which he undertook with deep commitment for more than 22 years. He served with distinction on two presidential search committees, and in 1981 was awarded Williams’ highest honor for alumni service — The Rogerson Cup.

In addition to his service to his college and country, our honoree has served his community with leadership positions at local hospitals, churches, schools and colleges. He has served as trustee, director, chairman and member of dozens of business and civic organizations, both local and national.

But how could one man be in so many places with so little time? In his 25th Reunion profile, he listed under “Interests and Hobbies”: Flying. This one word, along with his ready smile, a twinkle in his eye and a most stylish set of moustaches, defines this man whom we hold in such high esteem.

The son of a World War I pilot, he applied for flight training in 1942 but wasn’t accepted until 1945. And not until the mid-1950s, when Upjohn created an aviation division, was he able to pursue his love of flying. He acquired a half-interest in his first airplane and the rest is aviation history — literally. The Kalamazoo Aviation History Museum (“The Air Zoo”) opened for business in 1979 with vintage aircraft donated by our honoree. The Air Zoo today is a world-class museum, research, and educational facility that hosts more than 130,000 visitors annually and boasts a collection of more than 50 historic flying machines.

As founder, benefactor and prime mover for the Air Zoo, he was tabbed “Kalamazoo’s Own Special Ace.”

No offense, Kalamazoo, but he’s been Williams’ Own Special Ace for almost 70 years and counting.

Williams is proud to present the Joseph’s Coat — a symbol of her deep regard for this exceptional Eph — with gratitude and affection to her devoted son, from the Class of 1941:

Pete Parish