An altruistic Zionist known for his vision and audacity, Al Schwimmer has dedicated his life to building the State of Israel. He is an inspiring role model for the students of the Interdisciplinary Center Herzliya and for all who had the courage to immigrate to Israel to fight for the creation of the Jewish state.

The American-born son of Eastern European immigrants, Al Schwimmer grew up in Connecticut during the Great Depression. He served in the U.S. Air Force as a flight engineer during World War II, earning a commendation for his resourcefulness and bravery. He displayed this bravery again in 1947, when he volunteered to help the Hagana create an air force for the future State of Israel. Defying the U.S. embargo, Al Schwimmer acquired planes that played a decisive role in the Israeli victory in the War of Independence. After fighting in the war, he returned to the U.S., where a federal court revoked his civil privileges for life after he refused to plead guilty for doing what he believed was right. History proved him right: 51 years later, then-U.S. President Bill Clinton pardoned him and then-New York Mayor Rudolph Giuliani named him an honorary citizen of New York City.

Al Schwimmer returned to Israel in 1952, at the request of David Ben-Gurion, Teddy Kollek, Yitzhak Navon and Shimon Peres, to establish what has become the Israel Aircraft Industries. Thanks to his vision and determination, Israel progressed from repairing planes to making spare parts to creating and exporting sophisticated aircraft. At the same time, Al Schwimmer demonstrated his commitment to Israeli society by helping absorb new immigrants in the aviation industry, teaching them Hebrew along with aeronautical engineering; by building factories in areas suffering from unemployment; and by establishing the first pre-army preparatory school for air personnel. This commitment continued after he retired through his involvement in efforts to strengthen democracy and civil society. His many contributions to the development of the State of Israel have earned him numerous awards and honors, including the Israel Prize, the state’s highest honor.

In recognition of his outstanding contribution to Israeli security and aviation, the future of the State of Israel and the Jewish People, and the Interdisciplinary Center Herzliya, Al Schwimmer is hereby named an Honorary Fellow of the Interdisciplinary Center Herzliya.

Prof. Amnon Rubinstein
President
Herzliya, Israel
May 24, 2006