George Francis Ralston, Dean Emeritus of Student Affairs at Wilkes University and Special Assistant for Alumni Affairs, now beginning your second half century of service to this grateful institution of higher learning, you began as a boy in Harrisonburg, Virginia, the youngest of nine children, where you must have acquired that courtly southern way. A farm boy, you completed your schooling near Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, then returned south to the University of North Carolina where you were a star football player, a member of the Grail and Golden Fleece Honorary Societies and graduated with a B.A. in biology with honors in 1940. You almost immediately started your affair with the Wyoming Valley by teaching biology and coaching football and basketball at Forty-Fort High School for a year before entering the U.S. Army in 1942 as a private. After four difficult but challenging years of service in the Anti-Aircraft Artillery, earning two Purple Hearts, you left the Army in 1946 with the rank of Major, having demonstrated those qualities of leadership of your fellows that you would bring to this college during its formative years. Dr. Eugene Farley found you at Forty Fort High School and persuaded you to come to teach biology and coach at Bucknell University Junior College, soon to be Wilkes College, where over the next four decades you were Director of Athletics for thirteen years, Football Coach for eleven, Basketball Coach for ten, Baseball Coach for five, Dean of Men for twenty, and even, briefly, Dean of Women. Finally you became Dean of Student Affairs.

In all the roles you have played at Wilkes, you more than anyone else helped to set the moral tone for this campus that includes the dedicated nurturing of students, high standards of conduct that you modeled in your own behavior, and affording second, sometimes third chances to growing young adults to learn from their mistakes without forfeiting future opportunities to be responsible, honorable and productive citizens. From your role as campus preacher, a man of deep faith without dogmatism, you taught generations of Wilkes students to plan their work and to work their plan. In every gesture of your being, you met your students as equals and expressed your faith in their eventual worth as caring, moral adults even if you had occasionally to show them the straight road necessary to get them there. While you are usually visibly critical of second rate performance, you also demonstrate a buoyant optimistic belief that an individual can rise with disciplined effort to higher levels of achievement than he or she ever imagined possible. You became a living legend among student affairs professionals for your total, tireless dedication to students and their welfare. You also modeled a commitment to your community that is reflected in leadership roles with the YMCA, the Salvation Army, the Red Cross (where you must hold the lifetime record for most pints of blood contributed), the Boy Scouts, the Wilkes-Barre Rotary, the Mental Health Board, and your beloved First Presbyterian Church. On this campus as in our wider community, you have been a gentleman and a gentle man, a loving husband to your beautiful Helen and your four fortunate sons, David, John, Tom and Jamie, whom you cherished but never coddled, and who are now a great credit to their parents as well as to their alma mater. When you left the Army, you still hoped to become a medical doctor, and did go on for graduate work at Harvard and Columbia universities, but you gave up that ambition in order to serve Wilkes students, and now, Wilkes alumni. No living individual knows more Wilkes alumni nor has such formidable recall of details both great and small that evidence your total interest in and involvement with them as human beings, their family origins, their failures and successes, their personal growth and character, and their life course after Wilkes. It is with particular pleasure that I, by the power vested in me by the Board of Trustees of Wilkes University and by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, bestow upon you, George Francis Ralston, for a virtual lifetime of loving service to this University, the degree Doctor of Science, Honoris Causa, with all the
rights and privileges appertaining thereto.
Congratulations, Dr. Ralston.