History Professor Looks Back

I am the last active faculty member on campus who worked with Dr. Farley and along the way has enjoyed the pleasure of working with some of the best faculty members Wilkes has ever seen.

I include in the list people such as Dr. Charles Reif, who many referred to as the mayor of Butler Hall. In the day that single faculty members still lived on campus, Dr. Reif and others shared Butler Hall as living quarters, and he earned the title of mayor when he posted a roster outlining times for bathroom use by those staying in Butler.

Dr. Harold Thatcher went under the name “Harry the Hatchet” and put himself through school playing the piano at silent movies. Staff member Millie Gittens came to the school in 1941 and went on to run the bookstore for years while still finding time to work with students in their plays.

These are just some of the examples of the types of people that Dr. Farley brought to Wilkes, and he expected them to do more than just teach students in a classroom, that the educational experience was more that just information in books. Dr. Farley demanded that the faculty have a loyalty to both the school and the students, and he encouraged them, the faculty, to take a personal interest in the learning and growth of the students.

– Harold Cox, Ph.D., University archivist and professor emeritus

– Compiled by Mark Thomas ’82 and Kim Bower-Spence

Francis J. Michelini
1970-1975

My Wilkes experience started in 1955, when I joined the faculty as the third full-time member of the then-growing biology department. Dr. Farley made it very clear that the mission of Wilkes was to bring all people together, that it was a school where the individual worth and accomplishments of the student were most important. He also expected the faculty to impact the community and do more than just teach the students directly from some textbook.

I would become the first president to rise through the ranks of Wilkes, starting in 1963, when I became the dean of academic affairs, to the time that I would succeed Dr. Farley.

The transition from Dr. Farley into my administration was made easier when he was appointed chancellor at
Wilkes and took on the critical role of fund raising. Having Dr. Farley in this position allowed my administration to focus on academic and curricular program reviews. The academic administrative structure took the form of three newly created divisions: humanities, social sciences and science. New interdisciplinary initiatives were encouraged.

Just as this came into place, the Agnes Flood hit in 1972, and Wilkes had to move into a survival mode. The community came together to pull off this tremendous rebuilding effort.

**Robert Capin**

*1975-1984*

My primary responsibility as president was to balance the budget while rebuilding the campus after the Agnes flood of 1972. I inherited several problems that required constant attention.

First, of course, was the cost of rebuilding. Dr. Michelini led the rebuilding project from 1972 to 1975. However, the college was several million dollars in debt after rebuilding. Of course, all the time we were involved in the cleanup I was still charged with putting the college back on its feet both physically and financially.

Academically it was also a difficult period because of the impact of the flood and the related costs for the college, students and their families.

Despite all these challenges, the quality of our academic programs remained high.

I was impressed and proud of the dedication of Wilkes faculty. Physically, the campus was transformed. We invested nearly $50 million to renovate the wonderful old buildings but also to build several new structures: the Marts Center, the Henry Student Building and Breiseth Hall. We also renovated and expanded facilities at Ralston Field. The Fenner Quadrangle created a campus environment, including the statue of John Wilkes, which is one of my most pleasurable contributions. In addition, the endowment increased from about $2 million to $25 million.

– Compiled by Mark Thomas ’82

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**Christopher N. Breiseth**

*1984-2001*

I was the first outsider to become president since Dr. Farley himself.

We made a serious commitment to community service during my time at Wilkes. I was active in a group called Campus Compact, involving college presidents to guide students into community service both locally and nationally. Wilkes students were soon not only helping others in the Wyoming Valley but also using spring vacations to help with hurricane relief efforts in Florida and elsewhere.

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**COB renamed Breiseth Hall**

Joseph “Tim” Gilmour becomes president

**2001**

**2004**

Jay S. Sidhu School of Business and Leadership launches

Joint Urban Studies Center opens

First Outstanding Leaders Forum held

Student Center, later named for Frank and Dorothea Henry, opens