LEGACY of LEADERS

Centennial
1914 2014
Pennsylvania College of Technology
FORMERLY
Williamsport Area Community College
Williamsport Technical Institute
Williamsport Area School District Adult Education
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In Williamsport, the “lumber capital of the world,” rich lumber barons built homes along “Millionaires’ Row.”

The first industrial arts shop of its kind in Pennsylvania was part of the new Williamsport High School in 1914.

Opportunities in local lumber and wood industries made woodworking the school’s most popular shop course.
1914

Woodworking and lumber industries were booming along the Susquehanna River in Williamsport, Pa.

Known in the late 19th century as “The Lumber Capital of the World,” Williamsport was home to more millionaires, per capita, than any other city. Rich lumber barons built ornate Victorian-style mansions north of the river along a thoroughfare that became known as “Millionaires’ Row.”

Just around the corner, a small industrial arts shop, believed to be the first of its kind in the state, opened in the new Williamsport High School. The shop not only offered a place for high school students to learn woodworking and machining, it was also home to an adult education program that helped local residents, including World War I veterans, gain skills in order to secure jobs with area manufacturers.

Over the next century, leaders would rise from the halls of this neoclassical structure built to educate Williamsport’s youth. They were visionaries who not only influenced local students, but also earned national acclaim for bold experimentation in forging lasting connections between education, government, and industry.

This publication – developed as part of the Countdown to the Centennial marking 100 years of education at the historic site now known as Klump Academic Center on the campus of Pennsylvania College of Technology – honors the legacy of the leaders who made a difference in Williamsport and around the world.
“Every man had a little of St. George in him … If you want to get along with people put them in a position to slay a dragon every day.”
Dr. George H. Parkes was a practical dreamer. A son of English immigrants, he admired the land’s patron, St. George the dragon slayer, and doggedly pursued opportunities – from corporate boardrooms to city junkyards – to enrich a fledging educational program dedicated to the working class.

Later hailed as a “mechanic with a Ph.D.,” he entered the field of education in 1920, armed with a degree in mechanical engineering and experience as a railroad mechanic.

While Parkes was a student at Purdue University, Woodrow Wilson signed the Smith-Hughes Act – the first legislation to provide federal funding and oversight for vocational education. Eager to be part of a new trend in education, Parkes became one of the first college graduates in the nation to earn a full vocational education certification.

After graduation, Parkes returned to his Altoona hometown and to his job with the Pennsylvania Railroad. Determined to pursue a career at what he considered “one of the best schools for industrial arts in the state,” he asked the railroad to transfer him to Williamsport. This would allow him to keep his job while seeking a position at Williamsport High School, where he wanted to work under a pioneer in industrial education, William K. Yocum.

In 1920, Yocum hired Parkes to teach mechanical drafting; four years later, Parkes followed his mentor into the director’s position. The program then offered training related to the area’s primary industries – woodworking, patternmaking, cabinetmaking, machining, and drafting.

“It is rather remarkable, the sophistication of that program,” Parkes later said. “The high school was new. It was a well-built building and was quite elaborately equipped for its size and for the size of the program at that particular time.”

Vocational students also left the high school shops and worked in local industries to become directly acquainted with workplace needs. Parkes explained that parents were not always easily convinced of the value of placing their high school sons into these real-world situations.

He recalled that one early vocational program student was placed into a cooperative work experience at the local Darling Valve Foundry. The boy’s mother called Parkes to complain that her son had been sent to work “in a dirty hole.” She finally allowed the boy to stay after Parkes convinced her that the foundry experience would benefit her son, who aspired to a career as a patternmaker.

The son continued work at the foundry after graduation and became a successful draftsman. He also continued his education in Parkes’ evening classes for adults. His name was Carl Simon. He went on to become the president of Darling Valve, an expert in the atomic energy valve field, and a respected community leader.

“Absolute identity with one’s cause is the first and great condition of successful leadership.”

Woodrow Wilson
U.S. President 1913-21

William K. Yocum, Industrial Education Pioneer

In a 1970 interview, Dr. Parkes credited William K. Yocum, a 1916 graduate of the University of Wisconsin and the first director of Williamsport Area School District’s vocational education program, with building a foundation for future success.

“Mr. Yocum was a very energetic person and greatly interested in the service to industries. He spent every possible minute he could in the industries working with industrial employers and he was a strong leader; in fact, I attribute most of our … subsequent success, to his leadership in that he set up the organization system that permitted us to enjoy some measure of independence from the rest of the school district and therefore (we) were able to pursue some of our own objectives.

“There had been some very fine and very strong adult education prior to World War I in the school district, chiefly in the commercial fields … but we began the adult program – the evening school program, as we know it now – in those early years on a very small basis,” Parkes recalled.
Slow Growth and Possibilities

Parkes remembered that approximately 37 high school students enrolled in the vocational program during his first term. He was determined to reach out beyond these traditional students to fill his classrooms. He had a vision in which “working people who are misfits in their present employment, who are underemployed, may come to the school for assistance.”

Returning World War I veterans were among those needing assistance. In 1920-24, a temporary veterans’ training program operated from a rented facility in downtown Williamsport. It offered automotive mechanics, patternmaking, cabinetmaking, electricity, and drafting classes. Over the summer, its instructors would move classes into the high school to have access to better facilities. Eventually, the temporary program closed, but the high school program for veterans continued to grow.

“Well, it was slow growth,” Parkes said in a 1970 interview. “It didn’t look anything like our subsequent vocational adult school. But we began to see the possibilities, partly by our contacts with the industry and our research.”

A significant step in establishing the program’s credibility came in 1926-27, when Parkes, inspired by postgraduate studies at Columbia and Penn State universities, began a foremanship-training program that supported more than 20 local industries. Until then, most contact between the training program and industry had been to place high school students into cooperative education programs, in which they worked part time in industry while completing their high school education.

“Prior to that time, most of our industries, while cooperative, were doing it chiefly as a gesture of goodwill for working boys who couldn’t go to college and had to take vocational courses,” Parkes said. “But, when we started this foremanship-training program, the industries suddenly discovered that here was a service that would earn money for them, and from then on we had no further problems with getting the cooperation of industry. They just loved us.”

Foremanship training and cooperative education programs flourished, despite challenges that ranged from industry workers who wanted to smoke during training (not permitted in high school classrooms) to high school “co-op” students who wanted to leave industry jobs early each day for football practice and other extracurricular activity. Eventually, the effects of social legislation, child labor laws, and the financial impact of the Great Depression took a toll on these offerings. But challenge led to opportunity under Parkes’ leadership, and a growing campus footprint began to emerge in Williamsport.

“During the time which led up to the Depression, we had a good many layoffs in industry and we would never permit our boys to stay in the plant if there was a serious layoff in the plant, because it took the work away from family men. And so it became necessary then to start more expansive programs for full-time school attendance.”

Expanding the in-school training programs meant expending resources. Even with strong support from the school board and the local business community, funds were in short supply.

At the same time, changes – including the growth in mass production of automobiles – opened new opportunities for workers. Parkes was determined to offer training for automobile mechanics. With no money to build, he converted an old locker room in the southwest corner of the high school building into training space large enough to accommodate one used automobile. One student enrolled in the first session. Then, the school board approved expansion into an unheated space under the football stadium bleachers. Instruction occurred as weather permitted. Finally, a new facility was built in 1931.

“This was perhaps one of the very first auto shop buildings built for this purpose in the state of Pennsylvania, or in the country.” Parkes recalled.

The facility was named “Unit 1” as an expression of the school’s commitment to build an entire campus devoted to vocational training. Parkes, along with A.M. Weaver, school district superintendent, and architect D.H. Schaumburg, visited vocational buildings throughout New York and New Jersey in order to develop plans for expansive new vocational facilities. But, the plans were never accomplished.
Desperate Measures

“It was the intention of the school board to go on and build unit after unit,” Parkes explained. “However when the Depression hit us, this all went out the window.”

While the school needed a machine shop, local families needed food for their tables. So, Parkes and Ralph Lehman, president of Susquehanna Supply Company, who later became district manager for the first Public Works Administration, launched a plan to build “Unit 2.” They offered a “basket of aid” – literally food in a basket – as payment for volunteers to work on the school’s next construction project.

Parkes recalled hiring an unemployed architect “out of my own pocket” to develop building plans. In dire straits, the school board, already consolidating schools and laying off teachers, funded $15,000 to build the foundation for “Unit 2” with the support of “basket of aid” workers, who were described by Parkes as “businessmen, salesmen, men who … didn’t seem to have too much skill but (were) willing to work.”

“It’s hard for us to understand now how desperate things were,” Parkes said in 1970. “But men, working men who had been quite successful family men all their lives, suddenly found themselves to the point where they couldn’t actually feed their children … people went hungry … this was a very hopeless, desperate situation. It left a scar on everyone … that never will be erased.”

Public works funding supported the completion of “Unit 2” and the program’s connection to the local unemployed continued to grow. It was no coincidence that the school, which was adjacent to some of the city’s largest factories, became deeply committed to improving the city’s economic stability.

A 1930 survey of local industries revealed that, while unemployment was high, there was also a shortage of skilled workers in Williamsport. Under Parkes’ leadership, the high school designed a retraining program and worked in cooperation with local agencies to screen, train, and place unemployed workers. The first experimental class in what became known as “The Williamsport Plan” enrolled in 1931.

Parkes said the retraining program was among the first of its kind in the United States. He later worked with the Department of Public Instruction to encourage the General Assembly’s passage of the retraining act. Nearly all the government’s annual appropriation ($75,000) went to the Williamsport program — “not because we were selfish,” he explained, “but because we couldn’t get other school districts to get involved.”

Strong local support was also evident. At the same time that school district employees were asked to give back some of their wages to help cover costs, the school board doubled funding for the retraining project three times in three years. Along with increased funding, Parkes noted, came increased success in placing “graduates” in the workplace.

“We got to the point where we could pretty well say that if a man stayed with us and really applied himself, we’d get him a job,” Parkes declared.

“This retraining program was not a hit-or-miss affair,” according to The Williamsport Schools Through the Years, published in 1958. “Eight coordinators blueprinted the city’s employment situation and students were trained to fit specific jobs in the community.”

National Attention

The Saturday Evening Post was among the leading national media attracted to the story. It declared, “On the local level, down where the jobs and the jobless are, a movement is developing which, if it does not solve the unemployment problem, is due to make a sizable dent in it … What the Depression did to Williamsport was about what it did to most similarly placed industrial communities … but what Williamsport did to the Depression is a story in the best, though of late unofficial, American tradition.”

The article said that local unemployment was “a problem that came to rest” on Parkes’ shoulders and established him as a hero of Williamsport’s “program to match the available jobless with the available job.” The Post described Parkes as “a mechanic with a Ph.D., a passion for anonymity, and a mission … to train youths for jobs and adults for better ones.” Reader’s Digest and Woman’s Day called him a “mechanic by trade.” Ladies’ Home Journal said he was “the dynamic power behind Williamsport’s youth training.”
A 1940 Woman’s Day article titled “Wanted: A Revolution in Education” spotlighted Parkes’ confidence, describing how he went to “the unorthodox length of promising a job to every student who follows his directions – a thing no other vocational school has ever dared to do.”

“Graduates of his courses were giving a good account of themselves in every plant in the city,” reported The Saturday Evening Post. “He had put some 150 supervisors and foremen through courses designed especially for them. His recommendation, in any shop, was as good as a lien on a job.”

The success of the retraining program developed to combat the Depression proved crucial to local industry again when the demand for skilled metal trades workers increased in order to meet government defense contracts before and during World War II.

“About 1936 … we began to see it (World War II) coming,” Parkes stated. “Our placements were easier. We could get jobs much easier and we knew the kind of work they were working on, that it had to be preparation for war. Most of our major industries had contracts with the British and French … they were manufacturing engines, for instance. Avco was making the R680 engine and the British, and earlier the French, were using these engines for training purposes.”

War preparation – and the orders sent here by the European countries – helped put Americans back to work after the Great Depression. By 1940, to meet the training needs of local companies like Avco, classes were in session 24 hours a day. More than 5,000 students were enrolled in the high school’s training and retraining programs.

“Anything we wanted, we got for war purposes,” Parkes said. “We went day and night.”

Activities at the school attracted some criticism from local residents who were against the United States entering the war in Europe, Parkes later recalled. But he remained steadfast in his efforts to provide training that would help local businesses secure industry and armed forces contracts.

“We were unobtrusively gearing up for war. It was inevitable,” Parkes said.

What We Do for a Living in the City of Williamsport

What We Do for a Living in the City of Williamsport, a study resulting from local job surveys, authored by Parkes was published in 1940. It led to national accolades for the city’s effort to combat the Great Depression.

The study compared payroll jobs and educational requirements.

The booklet detailed the “number, percent and educational classification” of 22,070 individuals employed in 415 occupations in Williamsport. It revealed that 41 percent of the city’s jobs required some high school or trade training; 28 percent required high school graduation or trade apprenticeship, 4 percent required college graduation. No high school or trade training was needed for 24 percent of the jobs; 3 percent were categorized as miscellaneous.

A forward written by A.M. Weaver, superintendent of Williamsport schools, lauded the study “designed to provide teachers with up-to-date information on jobs in Williamsport.” He concluded that, “If these youths are to avoid the frustrations and heartaches of unemployment and poor employment, it is important that their guidance and training fit them for useful employment in jobs which are open to them.”

A number of occupations of city workers at that time became mostly obsolete over the next century, including blacksmith, chair caner, ice man, laundress, linotype operator, pattern maker, porter, rubber worker, shoemaker, steam fitter, stenographer, and tanner.
It was during the World War II era of tremendous growth that Williamsport Technical Institute was born in 1941 – taking a homegrown, local education program to a national audience.

“The people of Williamsport had taken very good care of their own youth … we had set up vocational education for our students, which was second to none anywhere in the commonwealth … and there was no unemployment among those students,” Parkes said. “Therefore, if we wanted to stay in business, we had to go places where the basic educational program wasn’t of that type.”

An early promotional message for WTI said: “The institute is dedicated to the principle that vocational education should fit itself to the needs of the individual, the community, and the nation.”

The National Youth Administration partnered with the technical institute for training. Parkes recalled that the Civilian Conservation Corps often had 15-20 buses parked in WTI parking lots on Saturdays, when CCC workers came for training. He also remembered large groups of high school students coming from northern New Jersey to Williamsport to receive vocational training that was not available in that state.

**War Training and Surplus**

Among those trained at Williamsport during war years were military construction battalions – carpenters, plumbers, and others – who gained skills in blueprint reading and mathematics. While in training, these individuals helped the school with its own construction projects, Parkes later recalled. The school’s aviation facilities at the local airport also became a site for Air Force mechanics’ training.

In addition to training opportunities, the war provided surplus materials that were put to use in Williamsport. By the 1940s, acquisition of war surplus materials was an important source of instructional materials.

“We developed this to a fine art,” he said. “At one time, we had nine people out on the road scouting military installations for surplus property that might be of interest to us.”

On one occasion, he shared, 16 vanloads of surplus equipment, costing approximately $10,000, brought an instant payback when faculty discovered enough useable machine tools in the first van to cover the entire cost.

Parkes fondly recalled how faculty “picked over” the surplus for any tools or metal that could be used, and then invited other public entities – such as schools and hospitals – to take what they could use as well. Whatever was left over then was transported to “the dump.”

“This gave us an almost unlimited access to … improving our equipment. This was usually better than the stuff we had worn out over the years. Every shop, every trade, got into the war program,” he said.
**Neighborhood Mentor**

A metal lathe in the Parkes’ family home inspired a lifetime of success for 1944 WTI graduate George E. Logue. Logue grew up in a house one block from the Parkes’ home. He first saw the metal lathe on a workbench in a dark corner while playing with Parkes’ son and other friends.

“Dr. Parkes came down in the basement and he saw me looking at it and he said, ‘I bought it for George and he never used it. If you want to play with it, you can.’ Well, that didn’t last too long. He couldn’t get rid of me.”

Parkes invited Logue to attend Saturday machining classes at WTI. He got involved in summertime National Youth Administration classes held at WTI, and in the 11th grade, began attending the school full time.

He studied in the machine shop; but was almost enticed into another program by his love of Caterpillar engines. As a 5-year-old boy, Logue began a lifelong connection with the iconic brand when his father bought a tractor for the family farm. When he spied a Caterpillar engine in the WTI automotive shop, he was ready to change his course of study.

“That’s where I want to be … where that Caterpillar engine was,” he remembered thinking. But Parkes gave him different advice.

“George, you’re too mechanical for that,” Logue said the WTI founder told him. “You take machine shop first; it’s more basic. The only thing that can reproduce itself in the world – that isn’t biological – is a machine shop. You can go in a machine shop and build another one. A Caterpillar engine will not build another engine, but a machine shop will build a Caterpillar engine and it will build another machine shop.”

As the owner of one of the largest collections of Caterpillar tractors and equipment in the world today, Logue still believes Parkes was right. “That was the best advice he ever gave me.”

With a backhoe he built in his basement, Logue started his first company in 1957. He later sold that construction business and expanded his manufacturing interests into Logue Industries Inc. He holds five patents. He also earned an award as Outstanding Alumnus of Penn State’s College of Agricultural Sciences; he graduated from that program in 1951.

In addition to Parkes, Logue shared memories of other early, influential leaders. They included Horace Lowell, who taught the first Saturday WTI class where he learned to use a metal lathe; John Shuman, a key WTI administrator who lived across the street from the Logue family; Lewis Bardo, who taught Lycoming Engine employees on machining equipment that Logue envied from the other side of the classroom; and Omar Harris, an English teacher who had the seemingly impossible job of teaching English to “shop kids.”

“He tried to move us a step up. Omar Harris made a real effort to give us pride,” Logue recalled.

Logue earned the college’s Outstanding Alumnus Award in 1973. Watch an interview with George E. Logue at www.pct.edu/centennial.
**Salvaging Success**

*The Saturday Evening Post* recognized that, “For a school to train the unemployed, Dr. Parkes had everything in the way of enthusiasm, determination, and experience, and next to nothing in the way of material assets. But the times seemed to call for bricks without straw, and he took on the job.”

“We had to make our own way,” Parkes said. “If we had lived on the tolerance of other people, we would have had a very poor time of it.”

In interviews more than 30 years later, Parkes acknowledged that, under his leadership, the school acted “in some respects as a salvage depot.” In addition to refurbishing students who may have foundered in traditional education settings, the school took advantage of its location in the neighborhood of some of the city’s largest junkyards. Faculty and students frequently were sent to the junkyards in search of discarded machinery and materials.

“We had Abe Fisher’s junkyard and we used it,” he said, recalling one item in particular – “an old wreck of a steam-driven concrete mixer” that he overhauled himself so it could be used during the construction of the machine shop.

“We would have had a very hard time during the Depression if we did not have them,” Parkes said of Fisher and other junkyard owners who allowed the school to scrounge materials from their sites.

Dr. James P. Bressler, who came to Williamsport Technical Institute in 1945, described Parkes as an innovator and a visionary. He recalled his first meeting with Parkes as evidence of the director’s unique perspective.

“He had an unusual vision of what he wanted to do in vocational education. It was rooted in the Depression era, when things became desperate – especially when it came to training people for basic skills in making a living, the basic jobs that were available in Williamsport at the time.

“He took me over to what were then the shops on Susquehanna Street. We went down into the basement and next to the welding shop was this huge space just full of junk and dirt and grime and grease. And he said, ‘Now, if you’re the man I think you are, you’re going to take this and make a department out of this.’”

Parkes passed along a tradition that began during his own early years at Williamsport High School.

“We got our start in the coal bins, in the basement of the present Klump center,” he said. “We had this fine anthracite coal piled in the shop … while I had had a good deal of heavy discussion with important people … nothing equaled the victory I had when I persuaded the custodian of the high school to shovel half the coal out of the coal bin so we could put the electrical shop in the other half.”

Parkes’ “can do” attitude inspired what he later called “a brain trust” of individuals who led the way in the formation of WTI. He said this evolution “wasn’t by chance, it was by design.”

“We had a philosophy that every man had a little of St. George in him … If you want to get along with people, put them in a position to slay a dragon every day,” he declared.

He hired individuals for the vocational training program who were teachers as well as distinguished in their craft. They had to “build themselves up as educators,” he said, and proudly acknowledged that “quite a sprinkling of Ph.D.’s out of the group” that included machinists and carpenters.
Dr. William H. Homisak, who was hired by the school district in 1948 to teach distributive education classes, including salesmanship, merchandise information, and advertising, described his early involvement with Parkes in the war surplus acquisition.

“Finances were very difficult. But, basically, you were creative. If I wanted, let’s say, a particular machine, a typewriter, Dr. Parkes would say, ‘There’s a military surplus store down in Harrisburg. You may want to go down and check ‘em out.’ And I remember going out and coming back with rubber boots, typewriters, equipment.”

Homisak also confessed that he learned to drive a tractor-trailer on the Pennsylvania Turnpike during one particularly memorable trip to acquire more war surplus.

“Clyde Brass (a member of the WTI faculty) and I were going to Philadelphia with a tractor-trailer, to bring back a load of war surplus. And on the way down, Clyde Brass says … ‘It’s your turn to drive,’ and I never drove a tractor-trailer. But those are some of the kinds of things … you were resourceful in knowing where what was, and how you could get it.”

Resourcefulness was not limited to acquiring equipment, Homisak recalled. The methods used to recruit students also became an exercise in pushing boundaries.

“It was not uncommon for Dr. Parkes to say, ‘You’d better get down there and see what’s going on at some of those bars, see who’s not working,’” Homisak remembered. “This seems terrible, but you’d kind of see these guys hanging around and you’d say, ‘Hey, have you ever thought of getting a trade?’”

Parkes’ interest in public relations was crucial to the early development of the institute, Homisak believed.

“If there was a convention in Williamsport, he would call me … ‘Bill, I’ll find somebody to substitute for you, you be along downtown, merge and mingle with the people.’ He felt that we had to sell the college in person … the idea was getting out, telling them who you are, and so on.”

Homisak, who maintained a leadership role at the institution – in 17 different positions overall – until his retirement in 1982, attributed much of his success to the guidance he received in those early years.

“Dr. Parkes would be the kind of guy that you would want to get involved with, or work with early in your career, because it sets you up, you know,” he said in a 2006 interview.
**Vocational Education Impact**

The Smith-Hughes National Vocational Education Act of 1917 provided federal funds to train people in vocational fields. It also separated vocational education from academics. States were required to establish separate boards to receive vocational education funding. Vocational teachers were required to have real work experience in their field of instruction rather than formal teaching certification. Students were required to spend at least half of their time in practical work instruction and no more than half of their time in academic coursework.

In a 1968 interview, Parkes described how he saw the conflict between academic and vocational education when he was a graduate student attending summer classes at Columbia University in 1922.

"Higher ranking educators … began to be concerned about this onslaught of vocational education in the United States. They undertook an effort to put a stop to it. They found out they were dealing with a very obstinate, practical, whiskered bunch of people who knew how to get along with Congress and so this worked out all right in the long run."

Parkes recalled that, when he arrived in Williamsport in 1920, there already were signs that segregation among the faculty could be an issue. He said that five teachers had been fired and their duties were being divided among other teachers. Because Parkes had teacher certification and most of the vocational teachers had no teacher training, he got a good share of the work. He was assigned to teach English, mathematics, science, and health along with his vocational subject, which was drafting.

He described working with a group of vocational students “who could have cared less about academic work” in a room so small that it had a fraction as part of its number – 201 ½. “It amounted to a one-room schoolhouse,” he said.

The students cooperated, but they wanted more shop time. He recalled one young man in particular who questioned why they needed to read *Silas Marner*. The question prompted Parkes to challenge the head of the English department – a classically trained woman – about her choice of curriculum.

In asserting himself, he said, he gained greater control over the curriculum presented to his students. He began using trade periodicals instead of textbooks and was successful in getting his most reluctant students to become readers.

“A couple of times, I got discouraged,” he said, “But I stayed with them.”

His fortitude may have come, in part, from his own preference for trade over academics.

“I got better oriented in the academic field by force,” he said. “See, I would have stayed in the drafting room, period. I was forced into it and it was a good thing because it taught me that even an engineer could do some other kinds of engineering.”

Parkes was also likely influenced by his own early struggles in school. In typewritten notes that he presented to the college archives, he disclosed early difficulties in school as a result of serious nearsightedness that was not discovered until he was in the fourth grade. Because of his delayed progress in those early years, Parkes was 21 years old when he graduated from high school and entered Purdue University.

After graduating from Purdue, he was determined to continue his education at Columbia University. He recalled that the entire Parkes family – parents and siblings – made great financial sacrifices so that he could attend summer classes at the university in New York City.

“I take some satisfaction from my Columbia degree,” he later wrote, “because I was then a railroad mechanic who held a degree from a land grant university, in those days sometimes referred to as a cow college, and also a liberal arts degree from the Ivy League.”

His personal struggles to earn an education and a lifelong interest in the mechanical trades created a strong foundation for a man who was destined to be a national leader in the development of vocational education under the Smith-Hughes Act.
Nearly a century after its signing, the act is viewed from different perspectives. While it established a national policy regarding workforce preparation, it also segregated academic teachers and students from vocational teachers and students. That separation and strict emphasis on job-specific skills over academics may have limited the intellectual development of vocational students, making it more difficult for them to adjust later to changes in workforce technology.

Parkes’ perspective on the issue evolved throughout his career. In that 1968 interview, he said, “I have become fairly self-critical in later years because I didn’t do enough general education of hundreds and hundreds of people who had the capacity in Williamsport … for instance, we have had a good share of the leadership in the labor movement who were graduates of our school and I could have given them better preparation … if I had done a better job of giving them a general education.”

**Brain Trust With Global Impact**

In a 1978 interview, Parkes cited a WTI graduate, Dr. Paul L. McQuay, who went on to become a distinguished educator, as one example of the type of individual promoted in the institution’s early “brain trust.”

McQuay graduated from WTI in 1968 with a degree in tool design technology and began his career as a tool designer and draftsman. He earned master’s and doctoral degrees from Penn State and became a teacher – first at WTI and later at Lock Haven State College (now University) and Penn State.

He returned to Williamsport Area Community College in 1974 as director of the Engineering and Design Technologies Division (and a full professor). He moved to Delaware County Community College in 1982, where he served as dean and later executive director/vice president of the Center for Business and Community Services and director of international studies.

In 1996, he became senior principal of Community Colleges for International Development Inc., where he was an educational consultant to the World Bank and conducted program reviews and evaluations for the United Nations. He was also founding director of Educational Partners for International Cooperation.

McQuay fondly remembered his early experience under the tutelage of Parkes and others at WTI.

“WTI and the early days of WACC could be summed up by saying, ‘We can do it’ – especially since we didn’t have much money and if the institution was to get anything, we made it, borrowed it, got it from surplus, or went without it,” he said.

“This was great training and experience for me, because eventually I devoted over 20 years of my career to building, analyzing, and consulting on educational systems in the developing world. I was drawn to developing educational systems by the stories Dr. Parkes would tell me.”

McQuay received the college’s “Distinguished Alumni Award” in 1982. His brother, Sidney L. McQuay, who graduated in 1967 with a machinist general certificate, earned the “Distinguished Alumni Award” in 1980. More information on the McQuays appears later in this publication.
Outstanding Leader Enshrined

In 1952, Parkes left his position at WTI to become superintendent of the Williamsport School District. After his retirement in 1958, he continued to work as an international consultant and as a part-time instructor of vocational education at Penn State University. He also served as “manpower consultant” to the City of Philadelphia in 1964.

When he was enshrined in the Vocational Administrators of Pennsylvania Hall of Fame in 1973, Parkes was cited as “an outstanding leader in industrial and vocational education who devoted unselfish service to his school, his community, his nation and beyond, with vision and ability to marshal human resources through education in both peace and war.”

Occupations, a vocational guidance magazine, heralded “his vision, his single-mindedness, his realistic perception of actual needs, his unflagging zeal, his kindliness and good humor, his extraordinary efficiency, and, above all, his truly amazing gift for enlisting support from all kinds and conditions of people and for infusing into them the same wholehearted devotion and enthusiasm that inspires his own efforts.”

James P. Bressler suggested that Parkes’ impact on the institution can best be described by a famous poet’s phrase, “Behind every great institution stands the shadow of one man.”

“That was Dr. George Parkes; that is the man,” Bressler said in 2006. “As beautiful a place as you now have, and as functional, and nice a job as you’re doing here, it wasn’t always so. It had to have its growing pains; it had to evolve out of something small. I think every student that comes here ought to at least be cognizant of the fact that you grew out of something before this. And that’s the way most institutions grow. They have a start and a man of vision behind it, and that was Dr. Parkes.”

Building Power

“The director must build power in his subordinates by giving them a chance to solve problems,” Parkes said. “He must keep in mind the military maxim that each officer is responsible first for doing his daily job. Second, he must prepare his subordinates to do his job if he is not available. Third, he must prepare himself for his own promotion.”

Dr. Parkes with an airplane promoting Williamsport Technical Institute
STARTING FROM SCRATCH

“Every job I ever had, I had to start from scratch. I had to organize it, form a framework organization, and set goals: What – where do you want to go and what is – what is to be achieved?”

Dr. James P. Bressler, who began his career in education under the tutelage of Dr. George H. Parkes, offered a look behind the scenes of the institution in its early days.

“My base of operation was largely in the basement of the machine shop, which was never meant to be a classroom, because you have a constant interference from noise level on the outside. But nevertheless, your facilities are not nearly as important as what you’re doing in them. So that, regardless of our facilities, we turned out some pretty good people.”

“I came here in ’45 and took a room full of junk and was challenged to make a department out of that. In 1946, just after we had all this in fairly decent shape so that we could use it for education, along came a flood. Now there was something that would break the heart of anybody, because after the flood, we used rowboats to row up and down Susquehanna Street and over to the steps to what is now the academic center, the high school. You could see the fish swimming in and out of the open windows of the machine shop. So there was this crud and oily mud coating everything, right in the middle of an educational program going on. There wasn’t an alternative to it but when the water receded to start cleaning up, and that’s what we did. Everyone pitched in and we got the thing back in to shape in a minimum amount of time.”

“On a regular basis, the welding shop was right across the alley from where we were teaching our courses in English. In order to keep the welding shop in business, they had to bring in a scrap ironer. Now when you have a dump truck load of scrap iron, and you’re loaded outside of the window where you’re teaching, the decibel level is liable to increase. So we had to stop every once in a while and wait ‘til the noise abated before we could proceed.”

Dr. James P. Bressler
Son, grandson, and great-grandson of Dr. George H. Parkes join Dr. Kenneth E. Carl in 1999 near a portrait of the WTI founder, displayed in the entrance of the Parkes Automotive Technology Center.

Parkes’ family visited the campus during a celebration of the college’s “Diamond 10” (85th year) anniversary in 1999. His son (also George) graduated from WTI in 1946 and continued his education at Penn State. Daughter-in-law Joan fondly described her husband as “part of an experiment to prove that a ‘tech’ student could go on from WTI and graduate from Penn State.”

She wrote that her husband “lived through a lot of the growing pains of WTI … he lived with military surplus surrounding him, and it seemed that it stayed around for years. (We may still have some.)”

Following the 1999 anniversary, Mrs. Parkes offered the family’s appreciation.

“Thanks for the memories. WTI certainly turned into something grand. I often wonder what Dad would think if he could see it now.”

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**A Legacy at Morgan Valley**

In 1976, Dr. and Mrs. George H. Parkes donated 205 acres of land at Morgan Valley to Williamsport Area Community College.

Dr. Paul L. McQuay recalled spending a good deal of time at the property with Parkes before the land was transferred to the College: “My involvement included carrying tools to and from the springhouse to aid in the garden, walking and discussing where the property boundaries were or should be, working with the surveyor … and generally exploring and enjoying this beautiful property.”

The land was used over the years for a number of instructional and environmental projects, including the construction – by students – of a retreat center used for staff meetings and professional development. A watercolor painting by the late David Armstrong, “Morgan Valley Springhouse” captured the beauty of the property; prints of the Armstrong painting were sold to raise funds for the college foundation.
Listen to interviews with WTI founding director Dr. George H. Parkes at www.pct.edu/centennial
“With us, ‘education for all’ is not simply a well-turned phrase; it is the philosophy that guides our teaching practices.”
When WTI’s founding director Dr. George H. Parkes left his position to become superintendent of the Williamsport School District in 1952, he assured faculty that the institute was in the capable hands of a new leader, who was still influenced by his own youthful grooming at the school.

Parkes’ successor was Williamsport native Dr. Kenneth E. Carl, who graduated from WTI in 1931.

“In Mr. Carl you have a strong leader,” Dr. Parkes wrote in a farewell letter published on June 27, 1952, in the WTI newsletter. “I know that you recognize his energy and drive and leadership and that you will give him the same support you have given me. Different times – different men. Mr. Carl is better suited to the times ahead than I. Mine was the era of the coal cellar shop, the laboratory under the bleachers, the foraging in the junk yard, the WPA, the NYA, the CCC. I was a professional mendicant. Now times are changing. The stone has become the cornerstone.”

Alice Carl Maguire recalled that her brother was strongly influenced in life by Parkes.

“In high school, Kenneth loved the drafting and quickly looked up to Parkes. Parkes told him he was a good student with potential in math and drafting, but would never be successful because his English skills were so poor. Kenneth buckled down and became an ‘A’ student in English and most other subjects. It was the beginning of a long friendship.”

While studying drafting in WTI’s cooperative program, the young Carl alternated between two weeks in high school classes and two weeks working at Lycoming Motors (later known as Avco Lycoming). The company – one of the area’s largest employers – manufactured aircraft, marine, industrial, and automotive engines.

**THINKING AHEAD**

He also participated in the college preparatory unit of the vocational course, taking academic work necessary to gain admission to a four-year college. He captured the attention of Parkes and others who had high hopes for continuing his association with the school.

“Some of our faculty, myself included, were interested in Ken Carl as a student for his potential as a future teacher in our field of education,” Parkes said. “We tried to build our future school by thinking far ahead for a supply of good teachers.”

After graduation from high school, Carl went to work at Lycoming Motors. He also continued his education, earning a Bachelor of Science in Industrial Education at The Pennsylvania State University in 1936. A year later, he joined the WTI drafting faculty and set up his first shop in a former gymnasium in the high school basement.

“I gradually filled that thing up and then we moved over to the auto shop,” he recalled. In the auto shop, the drafting area soon took over a space about 80 feet wide by 60 feet in length; it expanded even further, eventually moving into a former trolley car barn that was known as WTI’s “Unit 6.”

Parkes credited his young protégé with growing the drafting program and developing new techniques for education and workforce development. He named Carl department chair in 1940 and vocational coordinator in 1942.

“Under Carl’s leadership in our drafting department, our school began to look carefully at the practices used in our cooperating plants, and to develop skill in teaching these new techniques,” he said.

**DO THEY GET JOBS?**

The WTI founder demanded from his faculty a very strong work ethic and an appreciation for the importance of connecting education to real workplace needs.

“Every department head and every instructor knew that if his people were not placed in industry, there was no job for him. If it could be traced to his lack of energy or lack of ability, we fired him. If the whole program failed to make placements for a period of time – two to three years – we just wiped it out and took the space for something else.”

Carl recalled, “I peddled my graduating students all over the state and worked with them through interviews,” in his efforts to sustain his faculty position and his program’s future.
Further evidence that he was influenced by the Parkes’ philosophy is shown in several articles that Carl wrote for national publications in the 1940s and '50s.

In a 1949 *Vocational Education News* article, he wrote, “The general aims of all training at Williamsport Technical Institute are to encourage good citizenship, to instill in the students a desire to improve themselves, and to place in positions graduates with enough background and skills in their trades to enable them to advance to supervisory positions.... When a community and a school work together to discuss and plan for the educational needs of their youth and adults, great achievements are made for democracy.”

In “The Best Yardstick: Do They Get Jobs?” published a year later in *School Shop: The Magazine for Teachers of Industrial Education*, he wrote, “We in technical-vocational education are judged by the results accomplished. One yardstick is: Do students get jobs in occupations for which they are trained? The answer to this question will determine to a great extent the success of the school.”

This results-based philosophy continued when Carl was named director in 1952. James P. Bressler, who became an administrator after serving as a member of the WTI faculty, said that the institute’s teaching and learning philosophy was very much a part of the local community under both directors.

“Dr. Carl simply carried on the philosophy and the style...everything that Parkes had left behind,” Bressler said.

**Challenging Times**

Carl remembered his early days as director were quite challenging.

“Well, I had quite a job,” he said. Part of that job was to secure new equipment to train students for real industry needs. The school could no longer count on war surplus to equip classrooms. So the director developed strong relationships with companies – Lycoming Motors, Darling Valve, Sprout Waldron, and others – that would share equipment in anticipation of later hiring work-ready WTI graduates.

“They realized that if they were going to get people trained on the machines like they used... that we ought to have one up at our shop and sometimes they’d give us one and help us influence the school board that we ought to have this for the training,” Carl recalled.

“Avco gave us some machinery for the machine shop. Darling Valve gave us a couple wood-working machines for the pattern making.... Sheet metal shops gave us a few pieces of sheet metal equipment.... We’d get whatever we could, wherever.”

In the early years of the Carl administration, WTI shops were in full swing – welding was running three shifts of training – and programs were added with the help of local people working in related occupational areas. Carl recalled that Clyde Brass used government surplus bulldozers to launch a heavy construction equipment program and Bill Best established programs for sign painting and making neon signs. WTI even entered the field of health sciences, opening a practical nursing program with Divine Providence and Williamsport hospitals.

At the same time, WTI became a recognized asset in establishing the economic vitality of the local region, helping to attract new businesses and create a community of work-ready employees.

A school district booklet published in 1958, *Williamsport Schools Through the Years*, offered this review of WTIs influence: “The most recent demand for trained manpower that WTI has met is in connection with the Industrial Development Committee of the Williamsport Chamber of Commerce, which was set up in 1956 to draw new industry to the city. The decision of several companies to re-locate here has been attributed to a great extent to the availability of trained workers from the local Institute. Special courses of study have been geared to meet the specific demands of these companies.”

**Paving the Way**

As its training programs grew more diverse, WTI also experimented with a nontraditional vocational program that would shatter stereotypes and open new opportunities nationwide to individuals who were physically challenged.
As a drafting instructor, Carl saw opportunities for individuals with disabilities to be successful in that field. He recalled training one student who had only one arm and described being inspired by that student’s motivation.

“I became quite interested in trying to help the handicapped in that way,” he said.

His efforts paved a new trail in education. In 1951, WTI became home to the nation’s first comprehensive Vocational Diagnostic Program. The job-trial method, used to test the abilities of physically challenged individuals under real conditions in WTI shops, earned its place in history for introducing vocational education as a way to support and encourage people with disabilities.

When Carl described an “education for all” philosophy in a 1972 article titled “Rehabilitating the Physically Handicapped: The Williamsport Story” published in the American Vocational Journal, the journal’s editor said: “It’s unlikely that this article could have found a better author than Ken Carl, whose career is a mixture of vocational education and physically handicapped expertise.”

Asked to describe how he learned, without any formal training, how to teach students with disabilities, Carl replied, “It sort of grew on me as we went along, because I started off doing some of the same thing without programs for it, so to speak, and we just wandered into it and then finally set up this program.”

He explained that the state offered to pay the costs of teaching handicapped students a vocation, as early as the 1930s. The challenge, he said, was “no one seemed to know anything about training the handicapped.”

**Job Trial Method**

*Williamsport Schools Through the Years* described the pioneering program: “Feeling a need for a new, more practical method of vocational counseling of rehabilitation clients and clients with limited educational or cultural backgrounds, the school began in 1951 its Vocational Diagnostic Program. Under this program, the only one of its kind in the country, a client is enrolled at the school for a four-week period. During this time he is guided and counseled in his effort to make an occupational choice. The most important phase of the program, and the reason it is now gaining nationwide interest, is the job-trial method used. With the unlimited facilities of the school at his disposal, the client is able to spend two weeks in various shops and thus test his ability and interest under real, rather than imagined conditions.”

Carl deserved the credit for developing the program, according to his boss.

“I was the director at the time, but Dr. Carl, Kenneth Carl, was the pusher on it. He had always been, as long as I can remember, he’d been strongly interested in rehabilitation,” Parkes said.

Parkes said the idea of “treating the total man” had been discussed for some time “but it wasn’t until Dr. Carl sold his idea to the rehabilitation people that it went on to any great extent, anywhere.”

“We had been for a long time talking about this general method of operating. We knew that there were diagnostic clinics being operated all over the country… where you could go and get a complete rundown on your personality and all the rest of it…. We thought this was good. We always felt that we wouldn’t be complete until we got a strong diagnostic program for what you might call the retraining aspects.”

“Dr. Carl was the fellow that put it together and sold it to the rehabilitation people, and it was, for a school of our type, it was an innovation. For a public school, it was an innovation.”

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“Let us think of education as the means of developing our greatest abilities, because in each of us there is a private hope and dream which, fulfilled, can be translated into benefit for everyone and greater strength for our nation.”

J**ohn F. Kennedy**

U.S. President 1961-63
A high point of Carl’s career came in 1966, when he received the Bell Greve Award from the National Rehabilitation Association in recognition of outstanding contributions to the field. The association cited his groundbreaking efforts: “Dr. Carl’s persistent attempts at the untried also broke down the even more rigid barriers against training programs for those of limited educational and cultural backgrounds. The experience has been an inspiration to rehabilitation workers everywhere.”

At that time, it was estimated that Carl had worked with more than 10,000 physically handicapped adults. Among them were disabled miners who participated in WTI assessment and training as part of a cooperative program with the United Mine Workers of America and the U.S. Department of Education’s Bureau of Vocational Rehabilitation.

Your work with the physically handicapped has been of tremendous value, not only to these people but to the community and the state as well.

An excerpt from a letter to Dr. Carl from Carl H. Simon, Darling Valve & Manufacturing Co.
United Mine Workers

Carl described the impact of this training in a 1972 article he wrote for the American Vocational Journal, “Rehabilitating the Physically Handicapped: The Williamsport Story.”

“Thus picture, if you will, hundreds of former miners from several states with all manner of physical disabilities: heart, broken back, silicosis, TB, amputee problems, osteomyelitis, infantile paralysis, wheelchair confinement, and more…. Most possessed a third to tenth grade education, were 30 to 60 years old and married with up to 10 children. Practically all were on welfare rolls and very few had any idea of what occupation they would like to follow…. Many were just plain scared of going to school and many more were resigned to sitting on their porches for the rest of their days collecting their welfare checks and small disabled miners’ pensions. Had it not been for the perseverance and motivation supplied in various ways by the UMWA personnel, they would probably never have left their porches.”

A handwritten note found among many professional papers Carl donated to the college archives shows evidence of his humility and respect for individuals with special needs. This note – including underlined handwriting – was scribbled on the back of a manpower-training manual: “Rehabilitation – people who are disabled not disabled people. These are people…. Unmet need – Everyone is motivated – fears block this motivation. We do not rehab people – they rehab themselves. Only provide services.”

The services provided by WTI led to a pioneering program that earned respect nationwide. Carl became a national spokesperson for issues involving vocational diagnostic training. He testified at least four times before congressional committees on issues involving vocational and technical education, manpower training, and the rehabilitation of the physically handicapped.

Still, his interest in the people WTI served remained very personal. Bruce J. Wydallis, a miner’s hearing-impaired son who studied drafting at WTI in the 1950s, recalled that Carl inspired him with a handshake and an urging to “keep up the good work; you’ll do OK.” Wydallis did. Over the course of his career, Wydallis worked on the Mercury, Gemini and Apollo space programs and the Hubble telescope.
Another former student influenced by Carl was Amadou B. Barry, who came to WTI in 1962 as one of a group of Guinean students that frequently met with Carl to discuss career choices. “He wrote many letters to our embassy in Washington and to the African American Institute (our sponsor),” Barry said. “I know other African students from Togo, Cameroon and The Sudan benefited from his counsel and wisdom.”

WTI was officially approved for training foreign students in 1953. According to Williamsport Schools Through the Years, “The fame of the Williamsport Technical Institute as an outstanding vocational center has spread beyond the borders of the United States…. Educators from many foreign countries have enrolled at WTI to study our methods of vocational education in an effort to set up similar centers in their own countries.”

In 1954, students created a flag court outside the campus “trolley barn” to feature flags of WTI international students’ home countries – Venezuela, Colombia, Panama, Dominican Republic, Iraq, and Thailand. Hamdan Towgan, director of the Technical Institute of Baghdad, Iraq, visited WTI in 1954 to study organization and teaching methods to improve the delivery of education in his homeland. Two of his assistants, Lutfi Saour and Najib Dabagh, stayed for a year to receive technical and professional training from WTI faculty.

A Brazilian social worker was also on campus in 1954 to study the institute’s rehabilitation program. Zeny Miranda, who served as director of rehabilitation services and chief of the Retirement and Pensions Institute for Industrial Workers in Rio de Janeiro was a rare female among many international guests hosted by WTI.

Efforts to expand international education continued for many years. By 1962, Carl was teaching a two-week summer seminar for vocational educators from nations including Jordan, Spain, Korea, Afghanistan, Sudan, and Vietnam.

In an interview published in an advertising supplement in The New York Times on June 14, 1964, Carl told reporter Pete Martin that a key Middle Eastern leader also received a WTI education.
“One of our graduates is now Prime Minister of Iraq,” he said.

Note: History indicates that Tahir Yahya (1915-86) was the Iraqi prime minister from November 1963-September 1965 and again from July 1967-July 1968. To date, no official records have been uncovered to confirm his attendance at WTI.

The Times reporter described Carl as “a human dynamo who had me on the run from the moment I arrived.”

A growing national and international reputation, solid connections to the local workforce, and a challenge issued by WTI’s founder may have fueled Carl’s momentum and the institute’s higher aspirations.

In his farewell address, Parkes wrote: “The business of occupational training and adjustment has become highly respectable. Your big task now is to hold the territory you have so wisely staked out, and to continue to create the demand for your services.”
**Expanding Influence**

Carl was deeply committed to expanding WTI's influence. As president of the Pennsylvania Council on Local Administrators of Occupational Education in 1959, Carl told the Governor's Committee on Education it was “apparent that, regardless of costs, Pennsylvania must take immediate steps to provide comprehensive public junior colleges for its economic and social welfare.”

He acknowledged the challenges of developing, and paying for, a statewide system committed to meeting real, diverse workforce needs on a local level.

“It is certainly most difficult to forecast the cost of plant and equipment necessary to set up a system of public junior colleges in Pennsylvania. This is further complicated in that such public junior colleges should not be carbon copies, but that the curriculums to be taught in each should be dictated by the indicated present and future needs of the area which the public junior college serves.”

Carl’s passion for the cause led him to develop a visionary doctoral thesis titled “A Plan for Comprehensive Public Junior College Education for the State of Pennsylvania.” He earned his doctorate, after years of evening and weekend study, in 1964.

He studied systems in Texas, New York, Colorado, and Florida while developing his dissertation topic, and received an offer to work as a director of vocational education in the New York state system. But his desire was to stay in Williamsport, where he saw the potential to expand and grow.

“That was particularly what I was interested in… moving along with more adult education,” he said.

“Ken, like most of us at Tech in those days, speculated and did research in the adult education fields, hoping for a law which would give us the authority to grant associate degrees… or that some sort of community college could develop in Pennsylvania,” Parkes recalled. “While most states in the West and Midwest had long before developed community colleges, Pennsylvania was not included. Ken sought, in his graduate work, to help this movement along in our state and he spent much of his own money and time in exploring the techniques and history of community colleges, and he visited many such institutions.”

**Strong Neighborhood**

“Perhaps Ken’s greatest step to promote a community college in Williamsport was from the years 1952 to 1960, or thereabout,” Parkes said. Then, as director of the technical institute, he had begun to develop a strong neighborhood concept in post-high school technical work among the many school districts in the sparsely populated, somewhat financially handicapped area surrounding us, chiefly to the North and East to the New York line. These people had no access to strong vocational education and had become accustomed to sending their high school graduates to us on a private tuition basis, helped somewhat by state vocational funds, scholarships, etc. He spent a great deal of his off-duty time visiting high schools and school boards ‘selling’ our Tech as a place to get an education and a good job. By the time the Commonwealth was ready to think about post-high school education for its youth, Ken had built for us a strong pattern of acceptance of our educational services. Far more than anyone in Williamsport, Ken was Mr. Post-High School Education for northcentral Pennsylvania.”

Carl fondly remembered his efforts to convince local school directors of the potential to become partners in postsecondary education.

“I went around and talked to all the school boards within a commutable distance and tried to see whether they were interested in joining with us to form a community college and, of course, they were worrying about cost and that sort of thing. But I assured them it wouldn’t cost too much per student, and of course if they had quite a few students there, that would be wonderful for their population to be so educated that they could do so many different things,” he said.

Carl’s message was clearly outlined in “An Overview of Considerations Related to the Establishment of a Community College,” prepared for school directors and chief school administrators of districts, that might have interest in sponsoring a community college.

The overview described “The Need for a Community College” as follows:

“As the material of industry has changed, and as processes have become automated, the greatest resource of any individual, organization, state or nation is the
trained mind….It is now generally accepted that our recovery of industrial and business leadership will be by way of a productive educational system.”

The paper presented benefits and challenges of building a community college in Williamsport, based on the foundation of the existing technical institute. A primary benefit was WTI’s history of providing service to industry and preparing students for employment and advancement – impacting local salaries and tax base – as well as its ability to attract new businesses to the area, providing additional employment opportunities for local residents.

Creating a community college from WTI would expand upon opportunities by granting college-level credits for coursework, making the credits transferable into baccalaureate degree programs and elevating the status of graduates in the employment market. It also would provide greater access to state subsidies for students and the community, and provide freedom from the school district, allowing faculty hiring to fit specific needs.

The challenges would include turning over operational control from one school district – which had the power to levy taxes – to a group of sponsoring school districts represented by a board of trustees that could not tax citizens; the power to tax would reside in the individual school districts.

There also was the difficulty of determining what the college’s enrollment potential in any given year might be. Increasing access to thousands of residents throughout many sponsoring school districts would certainly raise costs, but it was uncertain how many residents would enroll. It was also likely that the school districts would not welcome the competition of the new college in hiring teachers. (College teachers generally had higher salaries and fewer hours.)

**Community College Act**

Despite challenges and uncertainties, 36 school districts in five counties signed on as potential sponsors of the college when a completed application was filed with the State Board of Education in January 1965. The application, according to *Pennsylvania Community Colleges: A Brief History*, published by the Commission for Community Colleges, Pennsylvania Federation of Community College Trustees, proposed that “the Williamsport Technical Institute be expanded through the provision of college parallel courses and that the expanded institution be known as The Williamsport Area Community College.”

While the application led to the founding of the local community college later that year, Carl’s contribution went far beyond the Williamsport region. His research and development work helped create the foundation for the statewide system of community colleges.

“It is sufficient to say that he wrote the final version of Act 484, the present Community College Act, in the outer rooms of the office of Gov. (William) Scranton, and helped materially in promoting its passage,” Parkes said. “Anyone familiar with Ken Carl and his writing will at once see his philosophy spelled out in most of the lines of the Act.”

Acknowledging this contribution, Scranton gave Carl the pen he used to sign the Community College Act.

For Carl, who was named the first president of Williamsport Area Community College, the transition from technical institute to community college was important because it increased opportunities for students and graduates.

“A career program must not become a dead-end road. It should be planned as a career ladder allowing all to aspire to his highest ambition according to his aptitude and motivation,” he said.

The associate degree, he explained, was “another step up the ladder; while it wasn’t a four-year degree, it was part way there, and they [students] could still keep on going if they wanted to.”
Seeking Accreditation

Assuring the quality of a WACC degree was foremost among the priorities of the Carl administration. According to the Spotlight student newspaper, the administration began proceedings for accreditation on March 30, 1966; Carl said the procedure would take approximately three years.

The first official accreditation was earned in 1970. In a report to faculty, administration, and trustees, an evaluation team representing the Middle States Commission on Institutions of Higher Education praised the college and its leader.

“The administration of the college is highly motivated, capable and well-qualified. The president personifies the college. He is enthusiastic, knowledgeable and of indefatigable vitality. He leads by example and everybody runs to keep up.”

The report went on to stress the importance of innovation and vitality on campus: “The atmosphere at WACC encourages initiative and experimentation.… The faculty is being encouraged to get out of the ruts and try new ways of teaching. Such an atmosphere is vital in keeping both faculty and students intellectually alive. The college is beginning to reap the rewards of this atmosphere of freedom.”

Finally, citing the leadership of Carl and the faculty in a drive to fund a local industrial park, the evaluators noted that the newly established community college was living up to the “community” part of its name: “The Williamsport Area Community College exemplifies a philosophy of community colleges which is often verbalized but seldom realized. The college’s commitment to its community is total, is real, and is significant. It is involved in the economic, social, and cultural life of north-central Pennsylvania in ways which few if any institutions of higher education ever even hope to achieve.”

Bridging Gaps

Carl suggested that his most enduring contribution to the institution may have been “bringing together of the vocational and the academic departments and melding them into one school.” He stressed the importance

Qualifying Faculty

“Do you have a degree? We need you.”

Dr. William H. Homisak, the first dean of continuing education at WACC (following years of employment by the school district and WTI), remembered this blunt exchange often was necessary to recruit qualified faculty.

“It sounds terrible, compared to what we do now in the academic field,” he said. “But, basically, it was very difficult at that time to find qualified teachers,” who also had trade skills.

Early in the 1960s, Homisak began to work part time as an evening and weekend instructor in Penn State’s vocational teacher training program. He used this experience to help influence future hiring for the community college.

“I (would) get these instructors, plumbers, carpenters, steam fitters, and so on, and I would teach them, from Penn State, to get them qualified to be certified teachers. I would teach them introduction to education, curriculum development, testing, and so on.… Basically these people…were qualified tradesmen, but they did not have the [academic] background.”

Many instructors over the years gained the academic credentials they needed to work in the classroom through this kind of vocational teacher training.

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of connecting general education coursework directly to “shop work” so students would be motivated to work harder in the general subjects.

“Surely it is much easier to teach students to think about things and ideas in areas and environments where the problem originates and where all the materials, tools, and equipment are available to demonstrate the practicability of the problem,” he wrote in a 1953 Pennsylvania Vocational Education News article.

Over the next two decades, Carl continued trying to bridge the gap between traditional higher education and the unique offerings that brought international acclaim to the Williamsport institution. He said that one of his greatest challenges as a leader was “getting local people to understand what we were about.”

While he and other administrators traveled around the region, campaigning for school district votes needed to approve its budget, WACC was touted as a leader in providing skilled Pennsylvania workers.

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GLOBAL REVOLUTION

It may have been fitting – given Kenneth E. Carl’s commitment to international students – that the first person to receive a diploma from Williamsport Area Community College during its inaugural commencement in 1966 was Ali M. Al Eady, of Saudi Arabia.

The graduation day proved to be a busy, but rewarding one for Carl. He not only processed with the Class of 1966, he also escorted his daughter Marilyn down the aisle at her wedding later that day.

Carl’s family noted his deep connection to international education as part of his obituary: “Under his leadership, WTI and WACC became world renowned for the quality of its instruction. After studying here foreign students from over 14 countries including Pakistan, Sudan, Thailand, Afghanistan, Africa, and Iraq, returned to their country to start similar technical schools and colleges. Because of the education, support and encouragement they received in Williamsport, they were able to make revolutionary changes in their own country. Many of these men continued writing or visiting Dr. Carl until his death.”

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KEY TO GROWTH

“Probably the most important development during the time of our moving into a community college status was the accreditation process,” declared James P. Bressler, dean of applied arts.

“The accreditation process was a self-study to start with, and then a very involved … assessment of the whole college-physical plant and the staffing and the programs that you’re offering … how does it measure up to a given standard for community colleges … that opened our eyes to the fact that we had a long ways to go; we had a lot of things to improve to – so our status was acceptable in the community college ranks. I think that was one of the important things that happened in my time.

“The accreditation process to me was a key to the growth of the whole institution. Because as we go along we become habit-forming, and we think, this is the way the world is. Well, someone has to come and tell us it isn’t, and that’s what the accreditation process did; it pointed out those areas in which we could improve our administrative structure… and this is the impetus that caused change. And change in the right direction. Look at what we have now; this didn’t just happen. It came about in increments, and you take any one of those increments out, and you lost the whole thing; it just folds. It was the accreditation process that woke us up, caused change to occur.”
STATE LEADER BURDENED BY COST

A study commissioned by the Pennsylvania Department of Education to rate the effectiveness of community colleges and other institutions in graduating work-ready students found that, in 1971, WACC provided almost as many skilled workers for the trade and industry fields (307) as all other community colleges in the state combined (380). Overall, according to the first official Vocational Educational Management Information System report, WACC had the largest number of occupational program graduates in 1971 – 804 of the state’s total 3,367; its closest competitor was the Community College of Philadelphia with 654.

Despite its success in graduate placement, by 1973, WACC enrollment was declining. The college was operating at a deficit and hoping increased state support would secure a more stable financial future.

“Our problem is that two-year, postsecondary career or vocational-technical education costs more to operate than does a two-year liberal arts college transfer program. When you have a predominance of career programs over the liberal arts as we do at Williamsport Area Community College, the problem is magnified,” Carl told the Williamsport Sun-Gazette. “If the Commonwealth desires that the public community colleges provide a strong career education program.… to supply the employment needs of the state.… it must be willing to pay its full share of the costs.”

Costs became a burden too heavy for the Carl administration to carry.

A collective bargaining agreement with the Williamsport Area Community College Education Association was set to expire on June 30, 1973. Due to enrollment declines and financial difficulties, Carl said no money for salary increases could be expected in the coming year.

In May 1973, the WACC board of trustees announced that an investigation into budgetary problems – requested by the faculty union – found “serious shortcomings in the way the present administration has functioned.”

Among the concerns noted were an inability to increase faculty salaries, lack of communication, and

a failure to delineate clear lines of responsibility and authority and to delegate these appropriately.

INTEGRITY AND CHARACTER

Following the announcement, board Chairman Clyde E. Williamson publicly defended Carl in a “letter to the editor” published by the Williamsport Sun-Gazette.

“Dr. Kenneth E. Carl is a man of integrity and his character is without question. The criticism of the board of trustees… was based solely on the mistakes he made in administering the college…. The board of trustees has called the attention of Dr. Carl to these failures in his administration of the college. Dr. Carl has responded by stating that he has made these errors and it is his intention to correct them.”

One month later, on June 20, the local newspaper’s headline declared, “Dr. Carl Resigns College Post.” Chairman Williamson again called Carl “a man of the highest integrity and unimpeachable character,” but noted that certain problems within the administration had not been resolved.

“I intend to enjoy retirement, after 36 years,” Carl told the Williamsport Sun-Gazette. “I have a lot of things I want to do. I want to spend time with my family, including my three grandchildren, go fishing, and do some things around the house. Then we’ll see what develops.”

Carl’s letter of resignation to the board of trustees declared his hope that the college “would grow in service to the community in the years ahead.”

One member of the board voted against accepting the resignation. L. Clifford Myers, secretary, offered a prepared statement in which he cited Carl’s “vision, dedication, knowledge and leadership.”

“Dr. Carl didn’t just help thousands of young people in our area – he helped change the lives of an immeasurable number throughout the state. All of us who worked with Dr. Carl realize what a tremendous impact he has had in legislation creating community colleges and legislation for ever-increasing state financial support for community colleges.”
Can-Do Style

Dr. Daniel J. Doyle, who was a young faculty member at WACC in 1973, conducted an oral history interview with the former president in 2005. He said, “Dr. Carl demonstrated a person-centered approach to his leadership. He combined this with the can-do style that Dr. Parkes and many of the faculty had toward the early development of vocational-technical education. He looked for opportunities when others were more focused on difficulties or threats.”

In 1981, WACC honored its first president with the dedication of the Kenneth E. Carl Building Trades Center. Among the dignitaries at the event honoring Carl was state Sen. Henry G. Hager, who drew a connection between workforce needs and the institution’s destiny: “The country is starving for men and women able to build – able to make things – and I hope one day WACC will be known as ‘Pennsylvania’s vocational college.”

As the college grew to fulfill Hager’s vision, Carl was a frequent visitor to campus. He regularly attended WTI reunions, and The Gallery at Penn College featured an exhibition of his bird carvings in 2007.

His family recalled that Carl’s bird-carving hobby

Loss of a Leader

The sudden death of a beloved leader touched WACC faculty, administration, and students in 1967.

Lewis H. Bardo, who was named the first dean of applied arts and sciences when the community college was formed in 1965, died from a heart attack in November 1967.

Bardo worked in the toolmaking industry before becoming a vocational teacher in Williamsport in 1939. In 1945, he led WTI’s machinist training course; he was named the institute’s coordinator in 1956.

With a fellow WTI faculty and administrator, John Shuman, he co-authored textbooks, Spelling for Trade and Technical Students, and How to Operate a Lathe, which was used to train manufacturing workers across the nation at the start of World War II.

Bardo supervised a number of student projects that benefited the local community, including a 1953 effort in which WTI students made more than 500 desks and chairs for the city’s elementary schools. He worked with fellow faculty Rolland Fague, woodworking, and Robert G. Thomas, welding, under the direction of Dr. Carl, who said “nearly half of the students at the institute” had some role in building the furnishings for the cash-strapped school district.

Arlene Deppen, who went to work as Bardo’s secretary in 1965, said her boss never forgot his working-class background.

“He was all for the workers and faculty,” she said.

James P. Bressler, who was appointed to fill Bardo’s position after his death, said Bardo “was loved by everybody, including myself…. Lew Bardo had problems to wrestle with. He was always concerned about projecting enrollment figures. And that is so important because it determined how many staff you had to hire; it determined what supplies had to go into the budget. In other words, the budgeting process rested upon your ability to forecast fairly accurately how many students you would have to support the budget.”


“At one time or another, nearly every one of us met the Dean face to face. Often the encounter was a bit rough – but that was a part of the Dean’s job, wasn’t it? – but never once did we doubt that here was a man who was on our side when the chips were down. And he was on our side – whether as an instructor in his early years – or as an administrator of Williamsport Tech – or as an advocate of the formation of the Community College – or as an intermediary with industry in finding us jobs.”

In his honor, the community college rededicated its gymnasium, built in 1939, as the Lewis H. Bardo Gymnasium.
began when two carving chisels washed up on the beach during a family vacation and jabbed his foot. He picked up a piece of driftwood and carved his first bird. Over the years, many noted bird lovers, including public figures, collected his work.

Barbara A. Danko, retired Penn College alumni relations director, recalled visiting Carl in his home while he was compiling a collection of papers and items from his tenure to donate to the college archives.

“During these visits, several things always stood out: his love for his family, his joy in carving wooden birds, his prize orchids, and his belief in and love of the college. He would greet guests to his home with a big smile and a ‘Come on in. I’m glad you came by’. … I will remember Dr. Carl’s smile, his pride in the college and his good-natured teasing. Most of all, I will cherish the carved cardinal pin he gave me on one of my visits to his home.”

Penn College President Dr. Davie Jane Gilmour shared the spotlight with Carl during the college’s “Diamond 10” anniversary celebration in 1999. When he passed away in 2008, she said, “Dr. Carl has, for many years, been a legend on our campus. Those of us who knew him were touched by his graciousness and his unwavering commitment to the mission of the college. He believed we had a duty to serve our community and to help those in need. His legacy will long endure.”

**Climb the Heights**

“Many people have considered the vocational-technical program as one which does not allow the student to advance himself through further education beyond the high school. This is not true,” Carl said. “I graduated from this program in 1931. I worked cooperatively in my senior year in industry and continued to work in industry after graduation for another year before I decided to go to college. I graduated from Penn State in 1936, earned my doctorate in 1959 and became a college president in 1965. You, too, can climb to the height you desire.”
“I say to you that leadership is a two-way thing. It is more than command. It is reasonable direction and reasoned response.”
Over 32 years, from the founding of Williamsport Technical Institute in 1941 to the resignation of Dr. Kenneth E. Carl as president of Williamsport Area Community College in 1973, only two men served in the institution’s top leadership post. Carl and Dr. George H. Parkes, founding director of WTI, were hands-on, “can-do” leaders; they built – literally from scraps – a unique, nationally recognized institution of higher education, guiding the institution through eras clouded by war and economic depression.

In the 1970s, throughout the nation, campus unrest was common. At WACC, the unrest and the growing budget deficits and faculty discontent challenged traditional, top-down leadership styles.

The day after Carl’s resignation was announced, Vice President C. Hershel Jones assumed authority. "In the absence of any specific assignment by the Board of Trustees and until such assignment is made, I am taking affirmative action to provide the leadership and decision making necessary for effective leadership of the College," Jones wrote in a June 21 memo to faculty and administrative staff.

Later that day, board Chairman Clyde W. Williamson confirmed Jones would be in charge until a new president was named. At a meeting of the trustees on July 2, the appointment was defined by a newly elected board chairman, Paul A. Paulhamus, who explained that Jones would lead without acquiring the title of president.

“By board policy [the vice president] assumes full responsibilities of the president when a president is not in office. He has the powers of the president, but retains the title of vice president and is not to be known as acting or interim president,” Paulhamus said.

In the June 21 memo, Jones indicated he would use his authority to handle matters efficiently – “at the appropriate administrative level with all due speed.”

“I need the help of all of you,” he wrote. “I am confident that we can all work together to do what we know must be done”

He tackled pressing issues during the summer of 1973 – closing low-enrollment programs and placing a moratorium on new programs until funding and student interest were secure.

He notified staff that, “in lieu of an absolute freeze on filling positions,” only his office would have authority to fill vacant positions. He assigned responsibilities of vacant positions to administrators. He instituted an exit-interview process, requiring that all departing employees meet with him prior to their final days on the job. He demanded an innovative, aggressive plan for recruiting new students and strengthening financial aid.

**Blueprint for Action**

He established a faculty advisory committee and asked three department chairmen to hold weekly meetings with administrative staff. Faculty chose William Ealer, Fred Bierly, and Bill Haney to represent the applied arts, and Robert Bowers and Daniel Doyle to represent the liberal arts faculty. Department chairmen Donald Bergerstock, James Logue, and Joseph Sick began to meet regularly with administrators.

On Oct. 18, Jones called a faculty-staff meeting to reveal a seven-point plan “to overcome our adverse financial position and permit sound educational planning and development.”

He said the plan was a “blueprint for action, not a detailed how-to-do-it set of instructions.” He issued a “clear and direct” call to action and vented a bit of personal frustration.

“I am desperately sick of contention,” he declared. “I am weary of apathy and unwillingness to take on responsibility. Ideas such as ‘Let the other guy do it’ … ‘cover your tracks’ … games and petty strategies have no place in organization. One way or another they will go.”

He also suggested that the seven-point plan was his response to calls from within the organization to find a new direction.

“Time after time in recent weeks, while I have been working toward developing motion and momentum in the College, you have told me – and it has come through loud and clear that you (the College) want direction and leadership,” he said. “I say to you that leadership is a two-way thing. It is more than command. It is reasonable direction and reasoned response.”
SEVEN-POINT PLAN
C. Herschel Jones introduced a seven-point plan “to overcome our adverse financial position and permit sound educational planning and development” to the faculty and staff of Williamsport Area Community College in Fall 1973.

1. Reorganize administration
   The first point called for administrative reorganization, which Jones said “may not accomplish great monetary savings, but it can give us the means to do more work and to do it more effectively and efficiently.”

2. Establish division heads
   Replacing department chairmen with new division heads – returning many former department chairs to full-time teaching – was the plan’s second point. “Again, what we shall experience here is a gain in efficiency and effectiveness through year round administrative assistance.”

3. Core curriculum
   Jones directed an extensive curricular revision that he said would “involve both substantive and structural change” to help balance revenue and expenditures. “Wherever it is possible to ‘core’ courses more effectively, this will be done,” he insisted. “Specialized training, where not economically sound, will be curtailed…. What I am saying is that there must be a balance of financial income and outgo in the College.”

4. Eliminate weak programs
   “We will seek out and undertake to eliminate from our curriculum programs which are weak and show a demonstrated low potential for development,” Jones declared. “All proposed new programs will be carefully evaluated and before approved will require an adequately researched proposal which will adhere to guidelines now being established.”

5. Establish “trade training” apart from collegiate programs
   Jones proposed that skills-only “trade training” replace most existing certificate programs. He suggested that individuals enrolled in specialized trade courses not be required to take general education courses and that, upon completion, they earn a special certificate of proficiency in the related trade – rather than a formal college degree or certificate. “Academic or ‘related’ courses will be required only in educational collegiate programs of the College,” he said. “Technologies will be more limited in number than now and will permit the award of an associate degree. Substantial credits in related subjects will be an integral part of the degree requirements.”

6. Require 60 credits for degree completion
   “We plan to establish and maintain normal degree requirements as 60 credits, exclusive of the physical education requirement,” he stated.

7. Assess consistent fees
   Jones concluded the plan with an initiative that would provide consistent structuring of tuition and fees. “We shall move toward establishing a policy consistent with sister institutions throughout the state – that no student be permitted to carry at his option more than 17 credits without an extra charge being assessed.”
His reasoned focus may have been rooted in life experience. A 1935 graduate of Ohio Wesleyan University, he spent 30 months in the Navy during World War II. He earned a master’s degree and served as a lecturer at American University. He earned a Ph.D. from the University of Wisconsin in 1942 and worked as an administrative analyst in the U.S. Department of Agriculture before joining the political science faculty at Bucknell University in 1950. He later accepted an administrative post at WACC in its early years.

Hoping to influence faculty in favor of his seven-point plan, Jones suggested that his 15 years in the college classroom, prior to administrative roles in government and education, meant he was a true “colleague” who understood their needs.

“I have given more hours to poring over these ideas than I care to mention, considering all of the implications and all of the concerns that I can identify,” he said. “Obviously, all of these things cannot happen at once. Some may not see fruition for a long period of time, but planning must be done now and notice must be given so that changes may occur smoothly with minimal hardship.”

Smooth changes were not in the cards. While WACC faculty returned to the classroom in Fall 1973 without a new contract, a brief contract extension did not improve the process of negotiation, and the faculty voted to strike at the end of October.

Eight days after proposing his seven-point plan, Jones issued a memo with the subject line “Possible Strike by Bargaining Unit.”

“All members of the administrative staff, department chairmen and clerical staff of the College are expected to report for duty and to perform their duties as usual on Tuesday, October 30, 1973. Personnel in these categories are expected to continue to work from day to day as they have in the past,” the memo stated.

At first, Jones suggested the college would be open “as usual” and invited faculty and staff to report to classes.

“All teachers who desire to teach may be in their classrooms, and we hope that students will report as usual,” Jones told the Williamsport Sun-Gazette. “We are concerned with the welfare of the students and hope that they will not be deprived of any part of their education. We will keep open as long as we can.”

WE WANT JONES!

When the faculty began picketing on campus, Jones suspended classes.

“Because the college has many shops where students may be exposed to accident or severe injury, and having the safety and security of the students in mind, the closing, because of insufficient instructors, now becomes necessary,” he said.

On Oct. 30, approximately 100 students gathered at an impromptu rally to voice concerns about the strike; many began chanting, “We want Jones!”

The Spotlight student newspaper reported that: “Absence of an administrator [at a gathering of students seeking answers to questions about the strike] caused the students to rally under the office window of Dr. C. Herschel Jones, chief executive of the college. When Dr. Jones failed to appear the students stormed up to his office.

“Dr. Jones, escorted by two security policemen; Leland J. Calistri, head of the business office, and Dean James P. Bressler, dean of applied arts, confronted the students’ demands in the Klump auditorium.

“Students expressed grave concern for the situation. They demanded that an emergency board meeting be called immediately.
“Several students threatened to carry the furniture from Dr. Jones’ office if he did not comply. Dr. Jones stated, ‘I’m so advised.’”

In an interview more than 30 years later, Bressler recalled, “Strikes, as you know, are not very pleasant, as a rule. What it did was made our job very unpleasant.”

The three-week strike ended with a new faculty contract that was ratified by the board of trustees on Nov. 15. Classes resumed Nov. 19.

The cost to provide increased salary and benefits to faculty, impacted by the new contract, as well as non-bargaining unit employees was an estimated $220,000. Because the college carried a $303,000 deficit from the previous year and anticipated an additional $80,000 deficit that year, the total deficit for 1973-74 was projected to be more than $600,000.

Jones faced the difficult challenge of managing operations under these conditions and proposing a budget for the following year. Letters in the student newspaper criticized cuts he recommended to keep costs in line. Students called for more efforts to increase enrollment by improving the condition of campus buildings, increasing recruitment and public relations activities, and halting recommended faculty retrenchments that could increase class sizes and impact the quality of programs.

“This school needs progressive leadership,” wrote architectural technology students Allen Graybill and Tom Hiegel. “Soon there will be a new president of this college and he should have more than a ‘skeleton crew’ to work with. Radical changes in curriculum and philosophy should not be made before he gets here. Any changes should be based on sound educational priorities, not immediate financial gains. Remember the students should and can have a say in the way this college is run.”

Student and faculty influence continued to grow on campus after the unrest of 1973. Faculty and student representatives were included, along with members of the board of trustees, on a search committee that selected Dr. William H. Feddersen as the new president of WACC in March 1974.

Jones returned to a role as vice president. He told prospective students, through a message in the 1974-75 college catalog, that WACC was “a focal point of educational interest, a place where ideas germinate, and where a welcome sign is extended to you if you wish to learn.”

He emphasized that WACC’s welcome extended to students of all backgrounds and interests: “It is the intention of the College to offer you the educational or training program which you are best qualified to pursue. We welcome you whatever your age or ability, regardless of your economic or social status. We are equally interested in you whether you want to be an architect, an auto mechanic, a sign painter, a scientist, a plumber or a philosopher.”

Jones left WACC a short time later. His message represented what had been and continues to be both a welcome and a promise to students. Through a turbulent time, the college demonstrated its endurability through negotiation and a continuing commitment to students under Jones’ stewardship.
I like that open-door philosophy.”
A 33-year-old, who had just completed his doctoral program, Dr. William H. Feddersen became one of the youngest college presidents in the United States when he accepted the presidency of Williamsport Area Community College in 1974.

In Williamsport, he found an opportunity to make a profound impact. His challenges included turning around a $600,000 budget deficit and mending relationships with faculty that had picketed for three weeks the previous fall.

“I understood there were some problems, some real problems,” he said. “But I saw them more as opportunities for leadership and that’s what I was really preparing to do with my life – to try to help institutions and people through leadership.”

As an undergraduate at the University of Illinois at Urbana, Feddersen realized he wanted to “be in a position where I could act as a change agent with others.” He found that position at WACC.

“I knew it was a very solid college. Maybe they were going through some tough times, but you know tough times don’t last forever…. They were obviously looking for new leadership, and fresh leadership, and I like to think of myself sort of as a forward-looking, innovative leader.”

Feddersen, a member of Phi Delta Kappa, the American Association for Higher Education, and the American Association of Community and Junior Colleges, discovered early in his career that community colleges were a good fit with his personal values.

He grew up in a small farming community in Northwest Illinois, nurtured by parents who embraced higher education, although their own parents had not.

“My parents both wanted to go to college, but they were denied that opportunity.”

Grandparents on both sides of his family did not support their children’s desires to continue education beyond high school. His mother, valedictorian of her high school class, turned down a full scholarship to a nearby private college because her recently immigrated parents did not see the need for a young woman to go to college.

Growing up with those stories and watching his parents fulfill a commitment to send all four of their children to college, Feddersen knew education was a key to success. Later, he embraced the community college concept because he felt it would ensure that “no one would be denied access” to higher education.

“What attracted me was the philosophy, the mission; it basically reflected what I believed. I strongly believe in equal educational opportunity. I like that open-door philosophy. I like the fact that community colleges were preparing students for jobs, real jobs that the four-year colleges were ignoring.”

With his high school principal as a role model, Feddersen set out to be “a change agent” to improve education. After graduating from the University of Illinois at Urbana, he became a high school teacher at a time when American’s community college movement was gaining strength.

The movement intrigued him. What started in California and Illinois early in the 20th century, as an outgrowth of secondary education, caught on across the nation after World War II; many states began to pass legislation creating community college systems.

Teachers’ College at Columbia University “really opened my eyes,” Feddersen said, to a career in college administration. In the Kellogg Community College Leadership Program at Columbia, he had a unique opportunity to be mentored by an early leader in the community college movement.

Dr. Ralph R. Fields, author of The Community College Movement, published in 1962, convinced Feddersen that he could be a successful community college leader. Fields even pointed Feddersen – who had completed an internship in Columbia’s records, registrar, and admissions offices – to his first administrative position, at the new Bucks County Community College in Pennsylvania. He also encouraged him to continue his education in Columbia’s doctoral program.

We must adjust to changing times and still hold to unchanging principles.

JIMMY CARTER
U.S. PRESIDENT 1977-81
Groundbreaking Experience

Bucks County Community College, the third community college established in Pennsylvania, opened in 1965 – the same year Feddersen completed his masters’ program. His mentor, Fields, who was well-acquainted with the architects of Pennsylvania’s community college plan, encouraged Feddersen to apply for a position as director of admissions and records at the new college. He became one of four administrators – president, business manager, academic dean, and director of admissions and records – hired in that first year at Bucks. His responsibilities included recruitment, scheduling, financial aid, counseling, and alumni. This early exposure to diverse operations proved invaluable in the future.

After a few years, Feddersen was appointed assistant to the president at Bucks. In that role, he had the opportunity to do research and resource development work. He helped to develop new programs, seek grants, plan budgets, and direct campus construction projects. Again, a wide set of early experiences prepared him for higher levels of responsibility. He began to believe he could lead an institution.

“I think I can do that job,” he said, after several years of assisting Bucks’ chief administrator.

His first leadership role came as a chief executive at Iowa Western University’s Clarinda campus. He was there only a short time when he began receiving calls inviting him back to Pennsylvania.

Feddersen first heard of Williamsport Area Community College – the second community college established in Pennsylvania – while he was at Bucks CCC. He recalled that WACC had a “tremendous reputation as THE leader in vocational technical education.” Concerned that he “was just getting started at Iowa Western,” Feddersen nevertheless felt his job history was relevant to the position at WACC.

“I knew the Pennsylvania system. I was there from the beginning,” he asserted.

At the urging of friends and mentors, he decided to “go for it.”

“I didn’t think I would be chosen. I thought I was probably too young,” he recalled.

Mentor Leads Movement

Dr. Ralph R. Fields mentored students interested in the community college movement from his position as a member of the faculty and associate dean at the Teachers College at Columbia University.

He stressed the importance of diversity and flexibility at community colleges, according to *Community College Movement in Perspective: Teachers College Responds to the Truman Administration*, published in 2003.

“Because of the very nature of the movement, no two community colleges can be exactly alike,” Fields wrote. “Each college is a reflection of the community served, the purposes sought, the functions undertaken, and the resources at hand.”

Fields began a teaching career in his native Arizona then moved to California, where he earned a doctorate in secondary education from Stanford. He was superintendent of San Jose public schools and worked for the state’s Department of Education before moving to New York to join the Teachers College in 1948.

In 1952, he went abroad to study emerging postsecondary systems in Europe. He visited county colleges in England and Wales, junior colleges in Scotland, and technical colleges throughout Great Britain.

According to *Community College Movement in Perspective* authors Martin Quigley and Thomas W. Bailey, both of Teachers College, Fields taught the first course on “The Community College” there in 1954-55. Fields also authored a book, published by the college, which called for community colleges to be “democratic, comprehensive, community-centered, dedicated to lifelong learning, and adaptable.” He said these qualifies were based upon the appeal of President Harry S. Truman’s 1947 Commission on Higher Education, which introduced the community college concept.

Fields, considered a pioneer of the community college concept, died in 2000 at the age of 93.
In describing the work of the search committee charged with naming a new WACC president, a December 1973 editorial in the Sunday Grit noted there were 351 applicants for the position.

“The committee has a formidable task in making its selection because the new president – as do most college presidents nowadays – faces major financial problems,” the editor wrote. “Besides being an educator, a college president must be a first-rate administrator and have a good sense of diplomacy.”

**Focus on Strengths**

One member of the search committee was an early advocate for Feddersen.

“I would say within five minutes after meeting him, I was very impressed,” said Dr. Robert G. Bowers, a mathematics faculty member who served on the search committee.

“The thing that impressed me the most about that first day when I met him, he really viewed all these things (strike, deficit, low morale) not as problems, which they certainly were, but he viewed them as opportunities and he felt he could make a difference – and he did,” Bowers explained.

Bowers also cited personal characteristics that he felt balanced Feddersen’s young age.

“He had a great wit, had great poise. He was obviously intelligent.... And I think the most outstanding characteristic that I observed that first day and throughout his presidency, he was one of the best listeners that I ever encountered in the administration.... He was professional and he absolutely was unpretentious.”

Feddersen said he felt “very fortunate” to be selected. He looked ahead to a great challenge by focusing on the institution’s strengths, including its size (it served the largest sponsoring district in the state) and the quality and diversity of its programs.

“I knew the strength was the vocational technical program.... They had programs offered nowhere else in the state,” he recalled.

These included postsecondary programs in diesel, aviation, and heavy construction equipment, which had no real statewide competition, as well as a unique secondary vocational-technical program – the only one in the state that was part of a community college.

The secondary program offered advantages to students – whose success in high school classes could allow them to complete a postsecondary degree or certificate up to one year in advance – and to the college, which realized recruitment benefits due to early exposure among high school students.

The college also had a base of industrial programs – machining, tool and die making, and others – that reflected the community’s workforce needs.

“There were strong industrial programs,” Feddersen said. “The facilities were poor, but they were former industrial facilities.”

Late-night industry training (“We had the individuals coming from plants at midnight,” the president recalled) – in addition to daytime classes for high school and college students and regular evening classes for adults – kept the campus in operation around the clock.

“Sometimes we couldn’t find time to clean the rooms for the custodians,” he said.

**Something for Everyone**

With high school students, college students, and adults learning together on the same campus, Feddersen said, “Williamsport was a pioneer and a model” for community colleges.

Despite the challenges in maintaining an active campus 24 hours a day to meet needs for postsecondary education, secondary vocational education, continuing education for adults, and industrial training, Feddersen felt this diversity was a reflection of the community college philosophy.

“There’s something for everyone – lifelong learning,” he enthused.

He also found the around-the-clock activity to be another example of Williamsport’s uniqueness.

“This was probably the best utilized facility in the whole United States, in my opinion, because I’ve done facility utilization studies and a lot of community colleges’ facilities are empty a large portion of time. That was not true at Williamsport.”

Still, the institution faced heavy financial pressures
brought on by two years of enrollment declines.

“They had like seven good years and then they had a couple of bad years,” he said. “Your budget is based on your enrollment. They didn’t anticipate that.”

So, he set out to erase a $600,000 deficit – approximately 10-12 percent of the overall budget – over a three-year period.

“I felt that we shouldn’t try to do this in one year… because it would negatively impact students and faculty and programs. So I was able to get agreement on a three-year plan. Within three years, we were in the black.”

Re-evaluate Everything

Early on, Feddersen instituted new processes for projecting enrollments and planning budgets.

“I saw this as an opportunity – because you have to assess and re-evaluate everything that the college is doing. You have to plan and we had to set in motion a new planning process…. The educational programs are tied to the budget. The enrollment is tied to the budget. Everything is tied to the budget. To me, a budget is a plan,” he affirmed.

He established cost centers to account for expenditures, sought new streams of revenue, and assessed programs in order to phase out those that “had seen their better days” and add new ones to meet emerging needs.

“I made major changes in the budget in two weeks. Reorganized the college in two weeks. Started a long-range planning process in two weeks.”

He consolidated programs into academic divisions that grouped similar offerings to improve communication and make administration more efficient.

He also convinced the college’s accrediting agency to accept a long-range planning study he envisioned as a self-study for an upcoming reaccreditation assessment. He started developing the study in April and took a full plan to the board in December.

In the early days of his administration, the Spotlight student newspaper described the new president as a man who believed “time should not be wasted in initiating change.” Despite a fast-paced agenda, Feddersen said he felt “warmly received” on campus where, despite financial concerns and a recent strike, people seemed “ready to come together.”

No Time Wasted

One of the new president’s first efforts to reach out to students was an invitation to join him for a cafeteria coffee hour. The Spotlight reported that many of the more than 100 students who attended the first gathering expected a standard, formal address.

“Instead, each table of students met and talked to Dr. Feddersen on a one-to-one basis about any problems at WACC or any suggestions on how to improve the college,” the paper reported. “Dr. Feddersen strolled from table to table as the students munched on cake and coffee. He took notes and discussed the questions asked of him with the students at each table. The students … were pleased with how the meeting was conducted.”

The president also created a college information office, led by Daniel F. Meckes. He appointed a college counselor and licensed psychologist, Thomas M. McNally, as ombudsman to hear student complaints and seek solutions. He formed a Speakers’ Bureau of faculty and administrators who addressed community groups, and he established a reception area inside the Klump Academic Center entrance to exhibit displays from each program area.

With little funding available for renovation work, Feddersen still made refurbishing the 60-year-old academic center a top priority in his first few months. Nearly 50 students assisted George C. Mosteller, surplus property coordinator, in removing old lockers, desks, and laboratory tables, and then painting walls and carpeting floors. The Spotlight reported, “It may not be a four-million-dollar renovation, but it’s a great second best.”

On Oct. 1, 1974, the student newspaper reported that a reorganizational plan Feddersen shared with students at an open forum in the early days of his presidency was already well under way.
Shared Vision

“I had a vision,” he said, “but I also knew that I needed to develop a shared vision for the college, that it couldn’t just be my vision.”

He established a steering committee and subcommittees to develop a new 10-year, long-range plan to articulate a vision for improving the institution – including its deteriorating facilities.

“When I arrived, I saw lots of plans…. But then I saw facilities, and there was a kind of disconnect.”

Feddersen sought to connect needs, plans, and budgets, and to put an institutional plan into action.

“It’s not just planning, but it’s also action planning and having specific goals and objectives, making sure they’re measurable, and then holding people accountable – myself included – for accomplishing these things, measuring your progress along the way and then resetting the goals or setting them higher,” he declared.

“I’m a great believer in planning, but more than planning – planning plus action,” he added.

Despite his eagerness to act, the young leader recognized that the campus was not quite ready to get down to the work of developing a long-range plan. The aftershock of the faculty strike and the still-very-real budget deficit stood in the way of collective, positive thinking.

“I knew the No. 1 job was to rebuild trust across the campus with faculty, the administration, support staff, students – with everyone – because without that trust, you can’t do anything. So forget about the facility problems and forget about all the other things that we want to do. We have to build a relationship where we’re united as a team, as a college, going forward,” Feddersen said.

He acknowledged that “hard feelings – especially with some of the administrators who had been there a long time” remained on campus.

“It’s easy to become dug in, in your positions,” Feddersen acknowledged, but he sought opportunities to move people in a new direction.

“If people are in disagreement, they spend a lot of time in that. That takes away time, productivity. I said, ‘Let’s spend our time productively.’”

To help employees envision a way forward, the president renamed the in-house newsletter “New Day News”
and printed a big, bright sunshine on it.

“I wanted people to think, ‘It’s a new day. We could start over in our relationships, in everything.’”

In the preface of the 1975-85 Long-Range Self-Study, Feddersen wrote, “Our planning process has not been perfect. We have much to learn. As we interact with one another, we should begin to see planning as a learning process, wherein we learn planning by doing planning. And we should learn through the dialogue stimulated by planning recommendations and objectives.”

When the plan was in place, he felt, “We had made a lot of progress in a fairly short period of time.”

“He really changed the environment,” Bowers said of the president. “He was very forward-thinking…. He wanted to empower people at the institution. He was not here to make all the decisions. He really wanted input.”

Feddersen used a bit of input that Bowers offered on the first day they met as he considered improving relations between the faculty and administration, in anticipation of contract negotiations.

“I said to Bill that I thought it was very important to have a faculty perspective working on the college side (in contract negotiations) … a faculty perspective present at the negotiating table,” Bowers said.

When Feddersen decided to use internal negotiations as a bridge between faculty and administration at future contract talks, Bowers was seated at the table, presenting that faculty perspective.

“I’m a strong believer in interest-based bargaining and not coming in with ‘This is my position’ and ‘This is your position’ and we just hang onto those positions, as opposed to trying to find common ground,” Feddersen explained.

“I had met Bob Bowers and we got along fine and I saw that he had the kind of personality, soft spoken, and he really believed in the college. He had the trust of the faculty and the respect, and I thought he would be a good negotiator for the college.”

Bowers accepted an administrative role as assistant to the president for employee relations and continued to teach.

“I think that signaled a new beginning of faculty-administration relations, that we could work together. We could even change roles,” Feddersen said.

### Meaning and Value

While cooperation was key at WACC, many faculty passionately defended their individual philosophies regarding education.

In March 1974, following a board of trustees meeting to review the budget for the coming year, James E. Logue, chairman of the English department, expressed his views on the importance of “liberal arts” education.

“Ritual art, language, literature, music, dance, philosophy, myth, religion are certainly as essential to man as his daily bread,” Logue stated.

“Man’s true life consists not alone in the work activities that directly sustain him but in the symbolic activities which give meaning and value both the processes of work and their financial products.”

Later that year, Logue – a Bucknell University graduate and president of the university’s alumni association who had joined the WACC faculty in 1966 – was named division director of communications, humanities, and social sciences at WACC.

He remained on the faculty until his death in 2004. The James Everett Logue Popular Reading Atrium in Madigan Library was named in his honor in 2007.
Uncovering the Past

Change creates casualties, which can, in turn, inspire unexpected success.

In December 1974, James P. Bressler, who joined the vocational program that led to the development of WACC in 1945, walked away from a top post as acting dean and assistant dean of post-secondary instructional services.

When he retired after three decades as a Williamsport educator and administrator, Bressler embarked upon a historic archeological exploration that unearthed previously unknown details about Central Pennsylvania’s ancient past.

“Archaeology has always been a first love for me,” Bressler said, reminiscing that, as a boy, he wrote a letter to noted American explorer Roy Chapman Andrews, offering to join the hunt for dinosaur eggs in the Gobi Desert.

His departure from the college in 1975 provided an opportunity to revisit his first love.

“I got into it as a complete new career from that point,” he explained. His first “real job” in his new career was through a contract with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation to do preliminary work prior to the building of Interstate Route 180 through Lycoming County.

“That turned out well,” he said. “That’s where I wrote my first book, on that project. Since then, I’ve written four others.”

Best known is Bressler’s Canfield Island through the Ages, a result of his 13 seasons of excavations along the Susquehanna River, which revealed the presence of Native Americans in Lycoming County as far back as 5,000 years ago. The location is now on the National Register of Historic Places.

Thirty years after his retirement from WACC – and following a distinguished second career in archeological research – Bressler still considered his connections with students in Williamsport as among his most important contributions.

“Even now, when I go to a grocery store, people come up to me and call me by my name. ‘Oh, you were my teacher.’ Now what better response can you get than that? And you find that nearly all of them turned out well. In other words, our institution, in spite of our deficient plant, turned out people that made a success of themselves… Isn’t that what we’re here for? … That’s the most important aspect of everything… working with students was my biggest love.”

Learn more about Bressler’s work at Canfield Island at www.pct.edu/centennial.

Bressler, shown in 2002 at the dedication of the heritage trail named in his honor.
**False Divide**

WACC faced the unique challenge of unifying faculty that often divided between “liberal arts” and “technical programs,” based on their areas of interest. Feddersen understood that the lines between these two interests were unique in Williamsport, where more than 90 percent of students were enrolled in technical programs.

“Most community colleges would have maybe 50 percent vocational-technical, 50 percent in transfer, some 60 percent in transfer – majority in transfer,” he explained. “Williamsport has that turned around.”

This created a unique working environment for faculty whose interests were particularly diverse.

“We’re a product of our education and training,” Feddersen declared. “So, if you’re trained as a physicist, you think like a physicist…. You know, that’s how you see the world and that’s how you think. If you’re an artist, you think like an artist…. If you’re in technology, you think in those terms. But I didn’t find any major issues or problems with that because the history (of the college) had been a vocational-technical emphasis. And people that came there knew that. I think they accepted that.”

The president also felt that the community college’s mission should overcome any division of interests – as all faculty worked toward developing career-ready students.

“I personally saw it as a false divide. I think career education bridges that because you need basic skills. I don’t care what you want to become, what you want to do, if you can’t read, if you can’t write, if you don’t know how to do mathematics, you don’t have the basic skills to succeed. And all of those skills – general education – are taught by the academic side of the house, if you will. And so bringing those together and seeing how these pieces fit together in the curriculum, I think reduced friction, whatever friction there might be between those two sides,” Feddersen said.

“Academicians like to debate,” he concluded. “So that’s OK. Debates can be fun; but, on the other hand, for the benefit of students, the faculty has to work together. And I think they worked together very well.”

One member of the English faculty, Veronica M. Muzic, recalled bonding with some technical area faculty and even sharing assignments.

“We would share papers. I would read them as an English person, they would read them as a technical person, and we’d get two grades and then average it out, and that worked nicely.”

“Associations with faculty outside my division… became commonplace, including the opportunity to pick up the phone and call Rich Weilminster or Ron Rock or Ann Miglio about one of their students who were in need of an intervention,” Muzic added. “The talent in the WACC classrooms was absolutely amazing; the opportunity to learn from one another was a gift.”

Still, she remembered, “constant bickering back and forth” among some faculty who could not agree on how to combine interests of developing skilled trades and “this academic stuff” that constituted the core of a legitimate college degree. The conflict, she said, also impacted students.

She recalled a period of time in which some “applied technology” students took to wearing jackets that featured symbols of their trades. She said there was “a certain pride in the fact” that they considered themselves nonacademic.

“But, very capable, they were. And many of them were as academic as any other academic. It was just a reverse snobbery for them,” she said.

How did these students – who perceived themselves as “nonacademic” – respond to having to take academic courses – including her English classes?

“They lived with it. Didn’t like it,” Muzic declared. “Thought it was a waste of their time, but ultimately were tolerant.”

**Strange Phenomenon**

Uniting academic rigor and applied trade skills to create a comprehensive degree would continue to challenge the WACC faculty and administration.

When Edmond A. Watters III was appointed dean of postsecondary instructional services, he stressed the importance of developing transfer courses to fulfill the community college mission.

In his inaugural interview with the Spotlight in 1975, Waters said, “A community college’s first responsibility
is to its community.... In order to fulfill that responsibility, a community college must truly be just that, a college, and make available a wide spectrum of educational opportunities.”

Waters explained his desire to see WACC develop as a base from which local students could later pursue a baccalaureate degree.

“In this community of Williamsport, I have noticed a strange phenomenon. Most of our students come from outside the community. I know the major reason for that fact is the technological emphasis WACC has always had, and so it is natural, given that stress, that we do attract students from all over the state,” he said.

With a struggling economy, Waters felt it was time to encourage more local, college-bound students to consider the community college as a starting point. He suggested the college “extend ourselves more completely into the community and serve Williamsport better by offering its young people the opportunity to take the two years of a four-year program here at a fraction of the cost of taking the whole four years at a traditional institution.”

In response, WACC developed more courses that would earn graduates advanced standing at four-year institutions and introduced specific degree options to fit students’ needs.

Associate of Arts degrees were designed to serve students who were not interested in a technical field of study. The General Studies A.A. degree offered a flexible schedule of English, humanities, social sciences, math, natural sciences, physical education, and health classes for students who wanted to transfer to four-year institutions. Students who were not sure about their future goals were encouraged to enroll in the Individual Studies A.A. program. An Associate of Applied Science degree was aimed at students who wanted to gain specific knowledge and proficiency in particular vocational areas. All associate degrees required the successful completion of 60 credits.

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**Career Education Vision**

As part of long-range planning discussions, Dr. William H. Feddersen introduced an idea that he said was “being talked about nationally, but I don’t think too many people were doing anything about it.”

“I started talking about a concept that they weren’t fully familiar with called ‘career education.’ They certainly knew technical education, vocational education. But in 1971, Sid Marland became the secretary of education for our country and he introduced this concept of career education,” he recalled. “And I thought that fit Williamsport perfectly because it started from the elementary, went all the way through the universities.”

“Sid Marland was saying every education program is a career education – or should be. Everybody should be prepared for the world of work – to do something.... So I introduced this: Williamsport Area Community College being a five-year, the secondary and postsecondary, five-year career education center for the region and for the whole state.... We could work on career exploration. We could work on career information with the area schools.... The idea was a career ladder that you could finish high school at Williamsport. You have the skills. You get a job. Or you could continue on in one of our postsecondary programs and you can get a job after one year or two years. Or you could continue on to the university if that was required because that was your career goal.... So that was part of the vision or part of the dream of creating that type of institution for the future, building on what was already a great strength – the vocational, technical component.”

Sidney P. Marland Jr. was Commissioner of Education from 1970-72 and assistant secretary of education in the U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare from 1972-73. He later became president of the College Entrance Examination Board (known later as the College Board) and chairman of the editorial board of Scholastic Inc.

When he died in 1992, The New York Times editorialized, “Dr. Marland was a forceful advocate of giving students field experience in different occupations.”
Prospects Rising

In February 1975, Feddersen was one of four community college representatives – others were from Massachusetts, Indiana, and Missouri – called to give testimony in Washington, D.C., before the House Subcommittee on Elementary, Secondary and Vocational Education, which was considering amending the Vocational Education Act.

“We need to improve opportunities for young and old and we need a more effective education system that is integrated, to improve efficiency in economy as well as the educational services,” he testified.

“Today, I think we are all aware that our country is experiencing a very unusual phenomenon. We have inflation, we have recession, and at the same time we are all feeling a financial pinch. This, I believe, mandates increased cooperation, increased methods of efficiency and effectiveness at all levels and in all education agencies – local, state, and federal alike.”

Before the subcommittee, he offered to elaborate on many success stories of graduates of WACC’s programs, including heavy trade and industrial offerings. Because of these unique offerings, he explained, more than half of WACC students resided outside its 10-county service area, which covered more than 7,200 square miles – an area only slightly smaller than New Jersey.

WACC celebrated its 10th anniversary in 1975 with a growing enrollment and a number of new initiatives designed to keep pace with students’ needs.

Following three consecutive years of enrollment declines, in Fall 1975, WACC enrollment rose 19 percent to include 2,914 (2,468 full-time and 446 part-time) students. While most students resided in Central Pennsylvania, at least one student from every county in the state was enrolled, along with 48 from other states and four from other nations.

Enrollment also grew in noncredit, community education offerings, which attracted 938 students, and in high school vocational-technical classes, which enrolled 1,500 students, in Fall 1975. Despite the enrollment growth and increasing revenue, Feddersen held the line on expenses.

“We are extremely pleased that the increase in enrollment is greater than we had anticipated,” the president told the student newspaper. “We still face a tight budget, however, in order to pay off the deficit inherited from those years when enrollment suffered severe drops. But our financial prospects are much better than they were.”

The WACC faculty association signed its first multiyear contract in Fall 1975; the two-year pact provided for raises equal to $1,000 or more the first year. In the second year, the college began distributing increments based on a point system valuing work and teaching experience as well as academic credentials, according to the student newspaper.

“Once we had that contract, then we can focus even more on this long-range planning and solving these other problems facing the college. So, everybody felt better on campus. The climate was better, the morale was better,” Feddersen said.
Right to Succeed

The president continued to seek faculty for leadership roles within his administration when he selected English faculty member Veronica M. Muzic to implement a new developmental education program to assess and address students’ learning needs.

“If you don’t place students, assess them, and place them into the courses for which they’re prepared to succeed, many will fail. You don’t want an institution where many students drop out and fail. Students have the right to succeed,” Feddersen stated.

The president acknowledged some resistance across the nation to any program that might limit students’ accessibility and contradict the open-door climate of community colleges. But he stressed the value of preparing students to be successful in their college classes.

“In learning, there’s a principle called the readiness principle. And if you throw someone over, their head’s in the water, and they can’t swim, they might drown.”

To help introduce the concept at WACC, Feddersen invited a nationally known expert in developmental education, Dr. John E. Roueche, professor and director of the Community College Leadership Program at the University of Texas, to campus.

“When Roueche announced his retirement in 2012, Community College Weekly said that he would “leave behind arguably the most successful program of its kind, one that has produced more community college administrators than any other.”

“I think you have to discuss these issues and get people to understand where you’re coming from philosophically and from a practical point of view. Is this best for students?… Dr. Roueche was very good at that as he spoke before the faculty, as he worked with the committees… He had data and research to back up what he was saying.”

Feddersen also stressed that the addition of computers in the workplace was making it more important for all students to be well-versed in basic skills, including reading and mathematics.

“The world is changing and it’s changing rapidly. I remember in the 1970s, there were no PCs…. But, we were starting then the computerization,” he recalled.

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Student Leader

SPOTLIGHT February 11, 1975

In 1975, a WACC student was the only college student in the country appointed to a U.S. agency’s national advisory council.

Robbin S. Schreiner was named to a two-year term on the Community Education Advisory Council of the U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare. The council was appointed by HEW Secretary Caspar W. Weinberger to advise the commissioner of education on policy guidelines and regulations of the Community Schools Act, passed in 1974.

Schreiner was the only female enrolled in WACC’s forestry program. She landed in the program after an accident and recuperation caused her to re-evaluate her career goals. Prior to the accident, she was studying to become a nurse.

“I found there were two schools in Pennsylvania with forest technology courses and WACC was one of them. Since it was close to home, I decided to enroll,” said the Lock Haven native.

The student newspaper proclaimed, “Whatever Miss Schreiner wants, Miss Schreiner goes after. At least that is how she received her appointment to the Community Education Advisory Council of HEW.”

Schreiner told a student reporter that she sent a resume and cover letter explaining her interest in community education after she heard about the council being formed.

“I didn’t hear anything for months and then I got a letter telling me I was accepted on this council, which was a great shock. But it is a great opportunity for me, too, because I have become tremendously interested in bettering the educational field,” she said.

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This increased the skill levels necessary for success in many technical fields.

“The public has the wrong conception that, if you’re a vocational program, you don’t need to have this information,” he said. “They don’t understand how much math is involved in these programs…. I was just a really strong proponent that this was something that we had to strengthen if we were to remain a leader in vocational-technical education.”

He appointed Muzic to examine opportunities to expand what had been individual remedial classes into a centralized program for assessing and placing students and teaching basic study skills and developmental classes in math, English, and writing.

“We committed to using the best faculty that we had at our disposal, because that was the one way to make sure the program worked,” Muzic said. “And so, we hand-picked.”

The results were impressive. When Roueche and his staff returned a few years later to evaluate the progress of the program, they found that reading grade levels of the WACC program students were higher than the national averages for community colleges.

Feddersen cited Muzic and others in describing what he believed to be one of his primary functions as a leader – to identify the right people to make the college work.

“You need to be able to recognize what is someone’s strength. What is their potential? When you find a Veronica Muzic and she’s teaching English, but you could see that she’s capable of more than teaching English. Wonderful English teacher…she can do more. Bob Bowers, he is a great mathematics instructor, but he has other skills as well. Tom McNally – ombudsman, what’s that? Well, Tom, you listen as a counselor; that’s all you have to do is listen and take notes and be objective, and report back. Then, we brought in some new people with skills and they made a great contribution as well.”

**Large Service Area**

The size of WACC’s sponsor district presented “a major challenge reaching out to communicate and make sure they (sponsoring school districts) are informed,” according to the college president.

He traveled the area every year, reporting to all 20 sponsoring school districts and seeking their continued financial support for the college at a time when their own budgets were stressed.

“They were having a hard time…. Balancing their own budgets, let alone contributing to Williamsport Area Community College,” he recalled.

During his presidency, William H. Feddersen was able to convince one more district – Northern Potter – to join in WACC sponsorship.

He said the budget review process was particularly complicated when many parties were required for approval.

“We’d present the budget and our plan for the next year and they had to approve it,” Feddersen said. “In addition, one member of each of the sponsoring school districts served in what was called the executive council. They were treated just like a board member. They got all board information. They came to all of the board meetings. They sat around the same table in the Parkes Automotive Center…. about 40 people all talking on the agendas.”

To support year-round communication, in 1976, the college issued its first *Community Quarterly* newsletter, to keep constituents up-to-date with WACC activities. Communications specialist Barbara Gilmour was the publication editor; the graphic arts department printed the booklet.
Bicentennial

A fond memory of the Feddersen presidency was celebrating the nation’s bicentennial in 1976. WACC joined a consortium of local colleges and Penn State in planning activities to celebrate the event. English faculty members Veronica M. Muzic and Ned S. Coates represented WACC on the consortium.

The week of March 29 was Bicentennial Week on campus; classes remained in session while guest speakers, displays and activities, and an open house were featured. Students planted two “freedom trees” in front of Klump Academic Center to commemorate the anniversary.

Construction students, with faculty members William G. Rummings and William P. Young, built a mountain stone fireplace patterned after those built in 1776. According to the student newspaper, the fireplace included five tons of stone, measured 12 x 4.5 feet high, and included a firebox that was 6 feet wide and 3 feet deep.

Feddersen fondly recalled that a highlight of the bicentennial was when the freedom train, crossing the nation in honor of the event, came through campus while traveling on West Third Street.
Groundbreaking Decisions

Muzic recalled that, while faculty often “rallied to pitch in, to do jobs that were not being done,” there was no denying that poor facilities continued to delay progress on the WACC campus.

She pointed to many “necessities” missing from the physical plant. There were no lighted parking lots, no air conditioning, no window screens, no handicapped access, and no adult-comfortable classroom seating (in rooms designed for high school use).

Critical decisions were needed – from repairing or replacing the antiquated Cromar Building to finding an alternative to leased space, in the Rishel Building, for housing the college library.

“You have to have a plan. You have to have the money…. It’s fairly complicated to get the support to build facilities. They are expensive,” Feddersen acknowledged.

The president made sure that the 10-year plan – broken into five-year phases – addressed facilities’ issues. After renovating Klump Academic Center, he secured resources to build a Learning Resources Center – to house the library, developmental studies, and the bookstore – and two instructional facilities, one for metal trades and the other for building construction trades.

Construction costs were estimated at $8.4 million, to be equally shared by the college and the state. Federal grants offset $1.6 million of the college’s share of $4.2 million.

The construction established a permanent base for the library and support services in the heart of the campus, replacing leased facilities blocks away from the academic center. It also created a safe, modern learning environment for some of the oldest trade programs on campus.

“It’s not just that they looked bad, but there’s health and safety issues. That was my concern,” Feddersen said. “The facilities were approaching the point of not being safe.”

In the fall of 1979, the headlines finally heralded a groundbreaking for construction that would mark the start of Phase I – Stage I of a Facilities and Site Master Plan that served as the college’s blueprint for the future.

“A new day is dawning for WACC,” said Joseph Bruno, community college coordinator for the state Department of Education, who attended the groundbreaking ceremony.

Also attending was Carl M. Hillyard, WACCEA president and construction faculty member, who quoted Winston Churchill – “We shape our buildings and afterward our buildings shape us” – and called for collegiality in continuing the college’s expansion.

“Every area of the college must work together cooperatively to make this a success,” he said.

Feddersen said the building program was tangible evidence of the potential of the long-range plan to affect the campus. The 1980 yearbook carried the theme “Blueprint for the 80s” – in reference to the impact of the building program.

“I think people then knew that it’s possible…. This dream of what we want to do,” the president said. “We couldn’t do it all in five years, couldn’t do it all in 10 years. But it’s possible, because we’ve already accomplished some things.”

Stage II of the long-range plan for facilities called for additional new instructional areas, administrative support service areas, and student housing. Student housing, Feddersen said, was one “giant issue” that was not accomplished by his administration.

“We didn’t resolve that problem during my tenure,” he said.

Then, no Pennsylvania community college had on-campus student housing. The colleges were created to serve students who could commute to classes from nearby sponsoring regions. Yet, more than half of WACC’s student population resided outside of its sponsoring districts.

In a 1977 interview with the Spotlight, Feddersen said housing was “a big problem” that cost the college potential revenue and could change the course of students’ lives. He feared that prospective students who did not enroll might turn completely away from the fields they were interested in because many of WACC’s programs were not available elsewhere in the state.

The college’s master plan for facilities called for construction of dormitories to house 400 students. The
plan stated that 62 percent of WACC students resided “beyond easy commuting range of the college and therefore must seek housing in the Williamsport area. Suitable housing does not exist.”

An earlier attempt by the college to operate limited off-campus housing from a leased property on Campbell Street (known as the Hoover dormitories) proved too costly and was abandoned. The administration worked with city officials and private developers interested in building and operating student housing, but was unable to gain state Department of Education approval.

A housing survey conducted the following year indicated that the “typical” WACC student had to make housing arrangements in order to attend college, lived in a rented room or apartment, and paid an average of $94 per month for room and basic utilities.

**Planning Continues**

In the spring of 1978, Feddersen used an article in the student newspaper to ask students “What’s Your Opinion?” regarding long-range planning.

“When we think about resources, we usually think about buildings, equipment, and money,” he said. “But, the most important resource we have is time. The minutes, hours, days, and weeks that all of us spend at WACC determine what the college is now and what it will become. In order to make the best use of our time, we have to plan. We have to decide what our goals are before we can begin to work toward them.”

He shared goals regarding external (community) affairs, institutional affairs (facilities, governance, etc.), educational affairs (instructional programs), and administrative affairs (systems and operating procedures), and asked the students for help in establishing new goals.

“Our primary goal is to make WACC a better place for you. We’d like your ideas on how we should do this,” he said. “We don’t know what we can do until we try.”

**Points to Success**

A year later, in the spring of 1979, Feddersen notified the board that he had accepted a position on the West Coast, as president of Napa Valley College in California.

When asked by a student newspaper reporter to reflect on his six years as WACC president, he said, “Everything I set out to do is either done or planned.”

He pointed to his success in raising the college out of a $600,000 deficit to a surplus of more than $800,000 in 1979, while growing enrollment and securing external funding to help support new programs and equipment, and the Stage I building program, as highlights of his WACC experience.

He felt it was time for “newer and better challenges.” Later he acknowledged, “I was very young and…. I was obviously ambitious.”

He also was intrigued by the idea of moving to California, which had the largest community college system in the country, and living in the Napa Valley – a rural, agricultural area like his Midwestern home. He felt that the time was right to relocate and allow his plans to be carried out by others.

**Computers Connect to Penn State**

A unique resource made available to students and faculty in 1975 was a remote computer terminal linking WACC to The Pennsylvania State University.

According to the Spotlight, the terminal provided complete access to Penn State’s computing facilities, including a library of programs, databases, and language processors. It was reported to be the first connection between the Penn State Center and a site outside of the university. WACC’s computer facilities were in Klump Academic Center.
“History is important. But you have to always have an eye on what’s going on today and what you’re building for tomorrow, for the future. I certainly enjoyed doing that at Williamsport.”

As he was preparing to leave, he recalled telling himself: “These things are going to happen. These things are under way. There is a plan. There is a direction. I’m not indispensable.”

Feddersen spent 11 years at Napa Valley College. He later became superintendent and president of one of California’s largest community colleges. At Mt. San Antonio College (1991-2002), he was able to secure a $221 million bond issue – providing the first opportunity to construct buildings on that campus in 25 years.

A leader in California’s community college system for more than two decades, Feddersen served as president of the Community College CEO Board, an officer of the Association of California Community College Administrators, and on the Community College League of California Board. He helped create the California Community College CEO Academy.

Following his retirement, to live in Palm Desert, Calif., he returned to Williamsport to visit the campus in 2004. He also established the Bill Feddersen Leadership Scholarship to benefit Penn College students.

**First Step**

“People will judge you by your actions…. They’re going to watch what you do, not just what you say,” he said.

“Become a leader for the right reasons, not the wrong reasons. Really know yourself. Do you want to be a leader because of your ego, because you’re attracted to power, because you want authority? Those are the wrong reasons. Or do you want to be a leader because you want to serve, because you want to help others. You cannot lead without followers. So, if you don’t have followers, you can’t be a leader. But a leader, you’re expected to go first. That’s what it means: step first. Be a risk taker and you need to have credibility.”

Dr. Feddersen receives a donation for the automotive program.
THREE MILE ISLAND

An accident at the Three Mile Island nuclear plant in 1979 created one of those “where were you when” recollections from the era of the Feddersen administration.

“I was in Harrisburg, at the capitol, where a lot of presidents spend their time,” the president recalled. He remembered it as an “unsettling period of time” as Williamsport was an evacuation center for the incident.

“It frightened many of the staff,” he said, “Some actually left … temporarily.”

After the incident, the Spotlight student newspaper found mixed reactions from a random sampling of staff, faculty, and students.

General studies student Richard P. Johnston felt the incident was blown out of proportion. “Accidents are going to happen. Our nuclear plants have put in so many precautions they are almost redundant.”

Food and hospitality student Leona E. Bogaczyk disagreed. “I’ve been looking for it to happen. It’s clarified what I’ve believed all along.” She encouraged use of alternative energies. “We use wood stoves and solar heating coils to heat our home,” she said.

Career development specialist Anna Weitz said she was “blissfully unaware” before the incident and described feeling “disbelief and fright.”

She said, “Before the accident I was mildly against nuclear power. In fact, I didn’t think about it. My mild concern has changed into ‘ban the nukes.’”

Director of Security Lawrence P. Smeak was concerned about safety, but acknowledged that risks are part of everyday life. “It (nuclear energy) has its place like anything else,” he said. “Back in the horse-and-buggy days when the car came in it was viewed as a killer, and it has killed many people.”

Robert G. Kissell, professor of history and government, said increased use of nuclear energy was inevitable. “It is the way of the world and the way of the future. I’m sure there will be more accidents, which will delay the process and force us into safer technological controls, but the die has already been cast,” he said.

Charles J. Marshall, a 1977 journalism alumnus, said: “I feel we should use nuclear energy, but we should put the strictest security measures possible on it. Total banning of nuclear reactors would be impractical to continuing the technological society we have become accustomed to.”
To make WACC more attractive to students with children, Dr. Feddersen originated the on-campus Tot Watch, a facility supervised by a registered nurse, Mary Bardo. Tot Watch offered more than baby-sitting; it arranged interesting, educational activities for children of WACC students. According to the Spotlight student newspaper, Feddersen and his wife, who had managed a nursery school in Iowa, donated much of the original equipment for Tot Watch.

Tot Watch open

Tot Watch, a child-care facility on campus, is located on the first floor of Klump Academic Center. The facility is open to children of both full and part-time students. Children enrolled must be between two-and-one-half years and five years old.

Registration fee for Tot Watch is $5. Hourly charges are 50 cents per hour for children of full-time students, and 75 cents per hour for children of part-time students.

Tot Watch is open from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. Monday through Friday. Snacks are served twice daily, but lunches are the responsibility of the parent.

Mrs. Mary Bardo, registered nurse who supervises the facility, may be reached at extension 329.
"I will have to admit … that, as the time went on, it became kind of fun to be No. 1."
When William H. Feddersen prepared to leave the president’s office at Williamsport Area Community College in 1980, he recommended that his dean of students, Dr. David M. Heiney, serve as interim president while the board of trustees conducted a national search for a new leader. The trustees agreed.

Heiney was so surprised that, when offered the role, he didn’t know what to say.

“The deans were always expected to be in attendance at board meetings,” Heiney recalled, “and as I walked into the room, Dr. (John M.) Bone, a trustee from Jersey Shore said, ‘Hey, come with me … I left my coat down at the Ross Club and I need to go get it. Ride along with me.’ I said, ‘Sure.’ So I got in the car and we were driving down and he said, ‘We just had a meeting down here and we decided that we would like to ask you to be the interim president,’ and I about fell out of the car seat. I said, ‘What?’ ‘Yes, yes,’ he said…. ‘We would like you to be interim president while we have a search.’ I didn’t know what to say, except that I would like to talk to Dr. Feddersen before I say ‘Yes.’ And I think when we got back to the meeting …. they all looked at him and were expecting a nod or something and I hadn’t agreed to it yet.”

Heiney learned the next morning that Feddersen recommended him to the board.

“I think this reflects on what kind of person Bill Feddersen was,” Heiney said. “He was a thinker … didn’t just jump into things.”

Feddersen told him, “I made a list of the qualifications that I think that an interim president should have – maybe not the same list as the qualifications as a permanent president – but for the interim president this is what I think it should be. When I looked at all of the deans, you had fit the bill. You had the qualifications.”

“Well, if that’s the case, then I don’t see how I can say ‘No,’” Heiney responded.

One of his first executive decisions was to tell the board “initially, right up front” that he did not want to be considered as a candidate during the national search.

“I already exceeded my goal…. My goal was to be a dean and I’d done that.”

Heiney was named dean of student and career development at WACC in 1978. He rose to that position during his second stint at the institution, which began in 1976, when he was appointed assistant dean of student and career development.

A local native and graduate of Williamsport High School (1958) and Lycoming College (1962), Heiney joined Williamsport Technical Institute in 1963 when he accepted a position at as a diagnostic assistant.

“What the heck is that?” Heiney recalled asking his Lycoming College adviser, who had suggested he pursue the job opening at WTI. Heiney had returned to Williamsport after one semester of graduate work in child psychology at the University of Iowa.

When he discovered the WTI position involved assessing rehabilitation students through a variety of aptitude and psychological tests, he felt it would be a good opportunity to put his psychology degree to work. He thought the program was “probably unique in the state … maybe one of the few in the country.”

He began to develop a different view of WTI than he had as a high school student.

“Those of us across the street in the academic building thought very little of the people who were on this side of the street – over in the technical institute,” he recalled.

Pretty Dynamic Place

“Once I got here, I saw there was a pretty dynamic place…. The fact that these kids weren’t sitting in a classroom so much as working at drafting tables, and down in the welding shop, and working on cars…. It was a totally different view…. It didn’t take me long to figure out this is a pretty good place.”

As a diagnostic assistant, he worked with physically handicapped and visually impaired men and women who came to WTI for a three-week diagnostic program that was developed under the leadership of Dr. Kenneth E. Carl, who was then head of the institute.

“I would see Dr. Carl almost daily,” Heiney said. “He was busy doing other things that presidents do, but he was a great supporter of that program.”

A full-time rehabilitation counselor worked with
the program assistants to assess the participants’ aptitudes. They tested their skills in various campus shops to help them consider what type of careers they might pursue.

“They could go to school elsewhere,” Heiney recalled. “But at least they had some career focus based on some testing and some actual hands-on experience.”

While working with rehabilitation students, Heiney had the opportunity to observe “junky and trashy” conditions in many of the shops on campus. He knew the conditions did not match the quality of instruction.

“There were people that came here from all over the country to interview electricians and machinists, because they weren’t trained anywhere as well as they were trained at WTI. I remember talking to someone at one time who came from Alabama to interview some electrical construction students because he said, ‘We need to have people that know how to bend conduit and nobody teaches that.’ Well, over in the electric shop, there is a huge room, which had racks of pipe.... That’s the kind of place it was. People were not concerned about how it looked but that the graduates knew how to bend conduit.”

Hands-on, practical experience was a hallmark that followed the institution as it transformed from WTI to one of Pennsylvania’s first community colleges in 1965. Heiney gave credit for the successful transformation to Carl, who became WACC’s first president.

“Kenny was a dynamic individual who loved this place, probably as much or more than Dr. (George H.) Parkes did.... I think he probably had a vision that he saw what the community college could do for this place and that maybe it had reached its limits as a technical institute ... and, with the community college movement, was smart enough to get us in on the ground floor ... a great tribute to him that we did.”

Heiney remembered “a lot of excitement” as staff and faculty anticipated the development of the community college on the foundation of the technical institute.

“We thought we were going to grow.... There was a lot of anticipation that maybe this meant with bigger enrollment, better facilities, new buildings – that kind of thing.”

Dramatic Change

Instead, a less visible, but perhaps more dramatic, change was required to establish the new community college.

“We went to the traditional semesters and 15 credits.... Well, that changed the way this school had operated for years, because it was previously based on hours. It was a 2,000- or 2,200-hour program.... They did individual instruction, so that, as soon as somebody graduated, the next person on the waiting list came in. So, almost any time of the year, an employer could find somebody ready to graduate.”

Some instructors and employers thought this change would bring about dire consequences.

“The instructors said, ‘This is not good,’ because now we’re only going to have people available in May and January, instead of 12 months a year and there were some employers, I think, at the time, who were a little upset...
about that because when they needed a diesel mechanic, they needed him now. They didn’t want to wait until the end of May to get one. So, that was a big change…. It was a significant change for a lot of people on the campus to change from the hours and the way people graduated to college thinking and college semesters,” he declared.

“College thinking” also created a new emphasis on student services. Heiney was named WACC’s first coordinator of student activities and housing. In that role, he organized activities, intramurals, organizations, and student government. The opportunity to establish more activities for students was a good fit for Heiney.

“When I was at Lycoming, I was very active in clubs and organizations and fraternity. I was a class president. I was on the student activities board. I had a mentor there by the name of Jack Buckle, who was the dean of students. I actually worked in his office and I think that’s when I really got interested. ‘Say, I think this might be a career – student life.’”

Student life and the student body evolved under his leadership. The introduction of liberal arts and transfer opportunities attracted students with diverse interests, including more females.

The growing female population was a challenge for his role as housing coordinator. He recalled the frustration of parents who tried to find suitable housing near the campus for daughters who wanted to attend WACC. “They would say … ‘I wouldn’t let my daughter stay there.’ I’d say, ‘Well, I probably wouldn’t let mine stay there, either,’” he admitted. “It was a challenge for parents to find a place that was acceptable.”

Recruiting more students – male and female, with both technical and transfer interests – became a priority in the early years of the community college.

“Never had to do that [recruit students] before,” Heiney said. “It lived on its name – WTI…. People from all over the country knew Williamsport Technical Institute.”
“We didn’t have the marketing or admission staff…. It took us a few years to get all that going and to get the image changed that we were your local college and this is where you need to come for a good, low-cost education, and get that message out.”

A key individual during this change was Heiney’s boss, Grant Berry Sr. Berry supervised operations ranging from admissions and financial aid to registrar and student activities.

“Grant was a calming influence…. I never saw Grant get angry, never saw him raise his voice. He just had a good sense of humor and he just kept things rolling along and kept me rolling along. He had this little, tiny office … room for two chairs for parents or maybe three chairs for parents and a student to sit down. That was it. He was quite a guy. I think during that transition period he probably had more influence in making that work than a lot of people realized at the time. He was a good guy.”

It was Berry who later invited Heiney to return to WACC, nine years after he left to pursue other career opportunities. In 1967, he accepted a position at the University of Delaware, where he was in charge of residence halls. He later moved to Delaware County Community College, where he was a counselor, admissions counselor, and director of admissions. He also started a doctoral program and began teaching psychology courses.

Return to WACC

Heiney returned to WACC in the fall of 1976 as assistant dean of student and career development. He earned his doctor of education degree from Nova University a year later. In the fall of 1978, he was named dean for student and career development.

The student newspaper lauded the dean for “talking and listening to students.” He met with students every Wednesday at noon in the Klump Academic Center cafeteria and allowed them to discuss “whatever is on their mind.”

The Spotlight also captured the dean’s fun-loving spirit in an article just before the 1978 holiday season.

“Who was that unusual person dressed in a red hat, multicolored shirt, blue shorts, suspenders, blue socks and shoes, in the cafeteria last Wednesday around 11:30? If you answered Kris Kringle, you’re close. It was none other than Dr. David M. Heiney.”

It was also Heiney, along with admissions director Chester D. Schuman, behind the wheel when the college purchased a 26-foot “career coach” to recruit students at events such as county fairs.

“Yes, I drove the van a few times,” he admitted. “It went to Hughesville, Bloomsburg, and Clinton County, and it was staffed all the time.”

His diverse experience in education – at WTI, WACC, and elsewhere – as well as his confidence and casual manner in interacting with students and staff served Heiney well when he was tapped for the interim presidency in 1980.

Although he chose not to pursue a permanent position as president, he noted, “I will have to admit … that as the time went on, it became kind of fun to be No. 1.” When the board reviewed final candidates for president in 1981, he had a chance to reconsider.

“One of the board members spoke up, ‘You know, I still think we ought to get Dave to apply,’” he said. “A couple others nodded their heads and said, ‘Yeah, I think we should. He’s done a good job.’ And I said, ‘No. I had my opportunity…. I won’t change my mind.’ But I think it was gratifying that some of them felt after nine months that I had done a good job and they were willing to consider me to stay on. So, it was a great experience.”

The experience had its share of challenges – including a memorable first month that Heiney referred to as “unbelievable.”

Chairman of the Board William H. Schrum was recuperating from heart surgery. The faculty contract was about to expire. The state had not approved a budget. The school districts had not approved the WACC budget. The new fiscal year was weeks away.

To focus efforts as quickly as possible, Heiney asked, “OK, what do we do here?”

“I had no control over the state appropriations. I had little control over the school districts,” he said. He
was determined to go to work on the faculty contract – in spite of advice to let the contract run out and negotiate later.

“I can’t wait that long,” he determined. “We got a couple thousand students that are going to come here. We need to do something.”

He got the faculty and administration representatives together.

“They met on a Tuesday night and they met again on Thursday and about midnight I got a call from Bob Bowers [administration representative] at home. He got me out of bed and said, ‘If we do another half percent, I think we can settle this tonight.’ Two meetings it took. And I didn’t have the authority to go over … Bob knew what the limit was and I didn’t have any authority…. It’s midnight and the presidents of the boards are not available…. What do you do? So I said, ‘Yes, go ahead.’ I took some flak for that a bit later from the board, but we got a contract.”

**Challenges Continue**

State appropriations were finally released after a hiring freeze and a freeze on capital expenditures. Challenges continued, including a severe fall drought, followed by a major autumn snowstorm that closed area schools and roadways.

“There were a lot of things in the first three, four, five months of school that I had to deal with,” he said.

One of the top challenges he faced was the “restlessness” of sponsoring school districts that were finding it difficult to approve WACC budget plans while denying funding requests from their own students.

He recalled one instance when a school board approved the WACC budget request during a meeting in which it also denied students an opportunity to take part in a statewide athletic tournament because it could not fund the team’s travel expenses. With a room full of students and parents pressuring the board, Heiney remembering muttering to a WACC colleague, “I think we need to get out of here.”

“We were competing for major dollars from these school districts, and the school districts … were competing with us for their own activities,” he said.

After steering the institution through one very challenging academic year, Heiney assisted in the transition of leadership when Dr. Robert L. Breuder was appointed president in March 1981.

Rather than return to his previous position as dean of students, he aided in the new president’s administrative restructuring, filling a vacant position as director of the building trades division and serving in a new position as director of institutional research. While his administrative experience was a benefit to the restructuring, the role did not satisfy his personal interests in the long term.

“I’m a people person, not a research person,” he said. Heiney left WACC in 1982 to become director of education at Williamsport Hospital. He continued to credit the institution with providing some of his most significant career accomplishments.

“It was just a great place and I had great experiences here – probably the height of my career, in terms of being the interim president…. I have very, very fond memories of WTI and the community college. I think it really gave the boost to my professional career.”

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Dr. Heiney, from Montage yearbook, 1981
Aerial view of campus, circa 1980
“I was willing to upset the equilibrium.”
The Board of Trustees of Williamsport Area Community College was not interested in maintaining the status quo when it began a national search for a president in 1980. The hiring of Dr. Robert L. Breuder in March 1981 set in motion one of the most transformative periods in the institution’s history.

“I think they knew what they were looking for,” Breuder said. “Someone to come in and maybe grab a whole institution that was languishing, that was challenged in so many areas … someone who’d have the courage and the conviction to go ahead and take it from where it was – in need of some help and some leadership.”

At 36, Breuder had the confidence to lead and to stand his ground when he met opposition.

“I was willing to upset the equilibrium,” he declared.

Dr. Robert G. Bowers served on search committees that selected Breuder and his predecessor, Dr. William H. Feddersen. He characterized Breuder as a “charismatic spokesperson, a real mover and shaker.”

“I think he was a true visionary … a risk taker, unfortunately an impatient risk-taker [with] very, very lofty objectives that stretched the college, that stretched himself, and sometimes stretched those around him,” Bowers said.

Breuder concurred.

“I did set a very high standard. I had enormous expectations. I was impatient. I knew where we needed to go. I wanted to get there quickly. I didn’t tolerate people who wanted to languish, hold onto the past, who were unwilling to perform, who were unwilling to give a full measure. I expected people to run as hard and as fast as I was willing to run.”

Breuder worked long hours and attended to details others failed to see. His high standards were reflected in physical changes to the campus that began soon after he took the presidential stage.

One of his first public acts was to dedicate three new facilities constructed under the Stage I building program developed by the Feddersen administration. The Avco-Lycoming Metal Trades Center, Learning Resources Center, and Carl Building Trades Center – named for WACC’s first president Dr. Kenneth E. Carl – were dedicated in the first days of Breuder’s presidency.

The potential to build something is what drew Breuder to the college, which he said had “a great history and a lustrous history, but still ... [was] in a pretty serious state of decay.”

“I don’t know that it had any competition equal to it in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania,” he recalled. “We had programs of study back then that nobody else had, costly programs that required anybody else to inject a lot of capital dollars to start them up. We already had them. We had excellent faculty... We could build off of that.”

“A leader, once convinced a particular course of action is the right one, must have the determination to stick with it and be undaunted when the going gets tough.”

Ronald Reagan
U.S. President 1981-89

Faith in Future

“I came to The Williamsport Area Community College because I was impressed by the college’s strength and vitality and because of my faith in its future,” Breuder told students in 1981.

He came from Brevard Community College in Florida, where he was district provost for institutional advancement 1973-81. He earned a Ph.D. in higher education administration from Florida State University in 1972.

A native of Queens, N.Y., he also earned degrees from the State University of New York at Albany – a master’s in student personnel services and a bachelor’s in biology. His classroom experience included teaching botany at Paul Smith’s College and biology at a junior high school in Albany, N.Y.

The son of immigrant parents, Breuder was the first in his family to attend college. Achieving a college presidency at a young age was an important family milestone.

“The first thing I did was to call my father,” he recalled, “‘Dad,’ I said, ‘You have a college president in the family.’”

He attributed his high regard for WACC’s technical
programs and industry-experienced faculty to his working-class heritage.

“I come from a blue-collar family,” he said. “My father was a tailor. So I appreciate people who maybe didn’t go into banking or law or medicine, but used their hands to create.”

Breuder used a sharp intellect to create, envisioning building projects that could rejuvenate a blighted campus or a city thoroughfare. He also possessed the courage to tear down remnants of the past that might block a clear vision of the future.

**Strong Impression**

The headline read “Cromar … going, going, gone” when the student newspaper reported the first demolition of a campus facility in 1981.

Cromar, built in 1926 as a factory producing high-grade wood flooring, was purchased by WACC in 1971 and converted into classrooms, offices, and a bookstore. A decade later, the structure made a lasting impression during Breuder’s first campus tour.

“I’ve never seen anything quite like it,” he said. “I can … remember that first walk on campus and three buildings that were, for all intents and purposes, condemned – the old Cromar Building [was] one of them.”

“I mean, literally, go into the bookstore and, when you looked up, you could see blue sky coming through … the actual counter that you went through to purchase your books was built on twin axles from a diesel truck with a piece of Formica on top of it. That was really symbolic or symptomatic of the whole campus,” Breuder said.

He described history’s impact on the entire campus location.

“It was formerly an agricultural site … a logging-crib area where you brought the logs and then you held them. That would give way to the industrial period in this country and, of course, we then have all kinds of industrial businesses on the campus with some education facilities sandwiched in between and railroad tracks running north and south, east and west. So it wasn’t a particularly pretty campus. It wasn’t well taken care of, so it obviously needed a loving hand.”

First impressions meant a great deal to Breuder. The tailor’s son was an outdoor lover who counted “big, deciduous trees” among his favorite things. He set out to bring a loving hand to the campus and to spruce up some attitudes as well.

“We didn’t have particularly good curb appeal,” he said. “We didn’t have much pride in our appearance and so, consequently, people would judge you accordingly. How good could your programs be, if in fact the outside didn’t present itself particularly well?”

How does a new president encourage faculty and staff to focus on improving appearances?

“You start by telling people first, ‘We’ve got to clean up.’ Forget the fact that the buildings – some of them – just needed to be ‘demoed’ and new buildings built. That was not an excuse for not at least keeping clean what you have.”

Cleanup and demolition would eventually remove three smokestacks that were symbols of the area’s industrial past. The most visible of these was near the administration building, a former trolley car barn that stood adjacent – and in grave contrast – to the new Carl Building Trades Center and Learning Resources Center.

**Walk With Me**

Bowers, while serving as Breuder’s executive assistant for internal affairs, recalled invitations from the president to “drop whatever I was doing … and walk around the campus.” The president would check every detail, including how many stones were in new topsoil. He also picked up paper everywhere he went.

“I didn’t pick up paper, but he did,” Bowers noted. “He wanted this place to be meticulously clean.”

Bowers relived one incident that seriously provoked the plant-loving president while they were stopped near a freshly landscaped area in front of the gym.

“A student was standing there, fidgeting with the rhododendron bushes, and he breaks off a twig…. I thought Breuder would have a coronary,” Bowers laughed, recalling how he was told to meet with the nervous student and tell him to expect dire consequences if it happened again.
Bowers spent 10 years working closely with Breuder. He said, “I was amazed that we worked together at all because he and I had totally different personalities. But somehow it worked…. He certainly earned my dedication and loyalty…. I wanted to work for him because, for the first time, I saw the full potential of the college.”

That potential became more evident as the campus evolved. Many credited Breuder with making a long-held dream for the institution finally come true.

“Many believe dreamers and realists are very opposite types of people,” Breuder wrote in an early message to WACC students. “However … to be a successful realist, one must first be a dreamer. Without a dream and desire, what chance do we have for success?”

Dreams came closer to reality as the college perfected a strategic long-range planning process under Breuder’s leadership. Eager to spread the word about the college’s efforts, Breuder; Rodney G. Hurley, dean of educational research planning and evaluation; and Dr. Daniel J. Doyle, planning committee chairperson, led a 1983 “Strategic Long Range Planning Academy” at the Association of Community College Trustees’ annual convention.

He told attendees that “to be viable, dynamic and in control, the community college needs a systematic approach to comprehending itself and its environment…. Strategic long-range planning provides the mechanism for assessing the present and forecasting the future in the context of institutional knowledge, environmental awareness, participant involvement, and future-oriented leadership that results in action rather than reaction.”

Doyle, who earned the college’s Master Teacher Award in 1984, said the planning effort brought renewed energy to WACC.

“Bob Breuder supported participant-based, long-range planning,” Doyle said. “He understood that openness to broad-based institutional assessment, while risky, was an essential foundation for a shared vision for the future.”
End of an Era

Williamsport High School (Klump Academic Center) was built on the north side of West Third Street in 1913; in the same year, a trolley car barn was erected across the street to serve public transportation needs.

According to articles published in WACC’s student newspaper, the Williamsport Railway Co. barn cost $420,000 to build and was 225 feet long by 50 feet wide. The last cars moved out of the barn on June 11, 1933. It was converted into a factory, R and G Knitting Mills, which operated through World War II.

The red brick structure was purchased by the Williamsport Area School District in 1942 and became the administrative headquarters of Williamsport Technical Institute. Classes operated on the ground level, the second floor held executive offices, and a telephone operator sat at a switchboard inside the main entrance. Classes held in “Unit 6” included drafting, printing, sign painting, biology, chemistry, and broadcasting.

David M. Heiney, who worked from the second-floor executive offices as interim president in 1980-81, first became acquainted with the building when he worked with WTI’s diagnostic program in the 1960s.

“We had an office with three desks in it and a pretty large conference room with tables and chairs where we did our counseling,” he said. “I remember the trolley car rails going down the middle of the hallway. That was my first realization that’s what this building was.”

Heiney’s predecessor in the president’s office, William H. Feddersen, also remembered.

“If you wanted to go to the president’s office, you went in this old industrial building, and the first thing you noticed … these tracks, trolley car tracks right on the floor…. Then, you go up the stairs to the administration and the president’s office. We had many buildings like this…. These buildings, I think, were worn out before they became used by Williamsport Technical Institute,” Feddersen said.

The building’s history intrigued many, including WACC journalism students who wrote articles about its storied past. A 1979 article said the original barn had nine tracks to hold 45 electric streetcars. An article published in 1976 said, “The tracks are still there. They lead to nowhere but to the past.”

When the board approved demolition of “Unit 6” in Spring 1985, nostalgia was evident in a final Spotlight article, which read: “Gone is the era when cooling off on a warm summer night included taking a trolley ride…. That era ended 52 years ago … and now one of the last monuments of that era will make way for progress.”
Renaming facilities in 1981 reinforced the changing face of WACC. A tradition of using unit numbers to identify buildings (the automotive building was “Unit 1,” the administration building was “Unit 6,” etc.) ended; full names and letter abbreviations were established.

Breuder continued to focus on first impressions. Throughout his tenure, he conducted ritual walks about the campus, searching for problems that needed correcting.

**Watched in Awe**

As plans began to take shape, students, employees, and the community watched in awe as Breuder led a complete campus transformation. Groundbreaking and dedication ceremonies became almost routine. Beauty emerged from blight – inside and out – as the college refurbished facilities, from the Academic Center auditorium to the technical trades shops along the former Susquehanna Street, which was closed to traffic to create a pedestrian mall.

The new Henry H. Hager Lifelong Education Center soon connected the Learning Resources Center to the campus mall and the adjacent Technical Trades Center. The center was named for the president pro tempeore of the state Senate, who helped attract state and federal funds for the building project. It featured science labs; architecture, drafting and culinary classrooms; a broadcasting studio; and executive offices. It also housed a large cafeteria, connected by a hallway to the bookstore in the adjacent Learning Resources Center.

“Bob Breuder is one of the most imaginative, far-sighted educational leaders I have ever seen…. He sees what we can’t even dream,” Hager declared.

As a central campus emerged, WACC also spread its footprint outside of Williamsport, opening a North Campus an hour’s drive away in a former elementary school near Wellsboro. Breuder also determined that students in construction-related programs should get a chance to benefit instructionally from the campus expansion.

“I always felt that, if we’re teaching people skills and we’re blending theory and practice, then (we should) give them the opportunity to put that theory to use by building something permanent that the college could benefit from,” he said.

Students were called to action when a conference center and Victorian-style guesthouse were added to campus. They also built a retreat on property at Morgan Valley, which had been donated to the college by WTI’s founding director, Dr. George H. Parkes.

Breuder said, at the opening of the Professional Development Center on campus, “If we seem very proud, it’s because we are very proud. This facility will stand as a permanent testimonial to the quality of instruction we offer here at the college.”

The president got into the dirt when it came time to landscape the Victorian House, convincing faculty adviser and Master Teacher Richard J. Weilminster to let him put his botany degree to work on the project.

“We would have field days,” Breuder enthused. “You got to get out of your situation and go dig and play in the dirt. We did it. I had a great time, loved it … could do it again tomorrow.”
The Professional Development Center was dedicated in memory of John F. Thompson, who served as associate academic dean during its design and construction.

Thompson joined the WACC administration in 1981 and held positions as associate dean of secondary education and associate dean of technology programs. Prior to his death in 1987, he supervised academic division directors and secondary programs.

“I think we’re on the cutting edge of technology because of some of our new programming initiatives,” he told the Spotlight in 1985. “We are unique in our commitment to hands-on education and the use of state-of-the-art, industrial-sized equipment. Our commitment to keeping pace with technology is important, as well as keeping our faculty current with technological changes. We are very fortunate to have a very dedicated faculty.”

Thompson was a native of Sayre. He taught high school agriculture and science, and served as an assistant principal and director of the Bradford County Vo-Tech School, before joining the WACC staff. He completed his doctorate in vocational education from Penn State in 1985, just months before he became ill.
Distinguished faculty

Ceremonial honoring of excellence among faculty was a tradition Dr. Robert L. Breuder introduced at the college in 1982 with the establishment of distinguished teaching awards.

Veronica M. Muzic, professor of English, was the first recipient of the Master Teacher Award. When she retired from full-time service, the college cited her again by naming the Veronica M. Muzic Master Teaching Award in her honor.

Muzic joined the faculty in 1968 and retired as chief academic officer in 2006. A popular teacher and mentor for students, faculty, and staff, she promoted fairness and equality in and out of the classroom.

In 1984, she told the student newspaper, “People should work up to their own potential and not be hamstrung by stereotypical thinking.”

Muzic continued to work part time at the institution, supporting efforts to promote quality through assessment and compiling self-study reports that provide evidence of those efforts for accreditation purposes.
**Master Teachers**

1982  Veronica M. Muzic, English
1983  Dr. Peter B. Dumanis, English
1984  Dr. Daniel J. Doyle, History & Philosophy
1985  Lamont E. Butters, Civil Engineering Technology
1986  Richard J. Welmingston, Horticulture
1987  Ann R. Miglio, Food & Hospitality Management
1988  James E. Logue, English
1989  Patrick D. Murphy, Advertising Art
1990  Nancy C. Bowers, Mathematics
1991  Victor A. Michael, Electronics Technology
1992  Frederick L. Rankinen, Civil Engineering Technology
1993  Ronald L. Rock, Business Administration
1994  Patricia Shoff Rambo, Business Administration
1995  James E. Doebler, Aviation
1996  Ned S. Coates, English
1997  Dennis E. Fink, Horticulture
1998  Keith A. Vanderlin, Graphic Design
1999  Brett A. Reasner, Aviation
2000  Benjamin H. Eldred, Diesel Equipment Technology
2001  Paul E. Mach, Food & Hospitality Management/Culinary Arts
2002  Dale A. Metzker, Printing & Publishing Technology
2003  Richard L. Druckenmiller, Building Construction Technology
2005  Dr. Irwin H. Siegel, Business Administration, Business Law
2006  Jeffrey B. Weaver, Electronics & Computer Engineering Technology
2007  Dr. Robert G. Bowers, Mathematics
2008  Dr. William B. Urosevich, Biology
2009  Dr. Christine M. Kessler, Physician Assistant
2010  Dr. Dennis F. Ringling, Forest Technology

*No awards were presented in 2004, 2011 or 2012.*
JEWEL IN THE CROWN

A jewel in the campus renewal crown was set in place in 1987 with the opening of the Advanced Technology and Health Sciences Center, which was later named for Breuder.

The president’s vision – that the center would improve the economic vitality of the region by offering education in emerging career fields that could attract new businesses and industries to the area – gained wide publicity even before the center opened.

When Gov. Dick Thornburgh visited campus in 1986, he said, “This center is a direct response to the important role advanced technology and our educational institutions are playing in the revitalization of the state’s economy.”

Viewpoint, a periodical published by IBM, lauded plans for the center. IBM invited Dr. James E. Middleton, dean of academic affairs, to demonstrate to other colleges how WACC developed a model for instruction in emerging fields of computer-aided design and automated manufacturing.

Middleton called the effort “one of the most comprehensive and integrated instructional programs” of its kind and said it would allow the college to “serve as a model of leadership in the education of advanced technology.”

“In the new (computer-integrated manufacturing) programming, we are blazing the path for much of the technology,” he said. “There aren’t a whole lot of models to copy.”

The college introduced an associate degree program in automated manufacturing in 1986. The program emphasized the mass production of tools, using advanced programming and robot applications to complement instruction in traditional tool-design technologies.

Three other programs that started the year – dental assisting, occupational therapy assisting, and culinary arts – were developed under the direction of Davie Jane (Nestarick) Gilmour, then director of the health sciences division. She later became chief academic officer before succeeding Breuder as president of the college.

“I learned a lot from him and he is – without a doubt – the foundational reason this campus is where it is today,” Gilmour said.

She pointed to a key element that made planning and developing the Advanced Technology and Health Sciences Center seem crucial to some and ridiculous to others: While Breuder was proposing the concept and seeking funding for the center, school districts were about to pull the plug on college sponsorship.

“If a man like Bob Breuder had not taken a risk on something like the ATHS, when we were about to close, we wouldn’t be here today,” Gilmour insisted.

When he announced plans for the center, Breuder told the student newspaper the building meant “the difference between having a viable college in the future and not having one.”

He saw it as a “flagship” facility that would redefine WACC as an advanced technology education leader. He believed increased public demand for its programs and services – beyond the sponsoring districts – could stabilize the college’s future.

SPONSORSHIP CRISIS

In October 1984, a special edition of the Spotlight student newspaper focused on the very real possibility that unresolved sponsorship issues could force the college to close.

“‘Dire straits’ could be a fair term to currently describe the Williamsport Area Community College, which now is embroiled in the center of a sponsorship controversy which must be solved as soon, and as equitably, as possible,” the paper reported.

“We do not believe that it is right for this institution – which provides many services to the area, such as jobs, job training, continuing education programs for individuals and industries, and a noteworthy impetus for the local economy – to be halted from providing low-cost education while it is forced to stand back and wait for someone to pick up sponsorship,” it concluded.

Community colleges could not exist without local sponsorship. Sponsors provided one-third of the cost of tuition for students residing in their districts; the state paid an additional one-third of tuition costs for Pennsylvania residents. This allowed sponsored students
to attend college at one-third of the total tuition costs.

“In Pennsylvania then, and still today, you have to have a local taxing body provide one-third of the tuition of the residents of that taxing body area,” Breuder explained. “In our case, we had 20 school districts. Allegheny County Community College had Allegheny County. Philadelphia Community College had the City of Philadelphia. We had the 20 school districts in 10 counties that we had to go out and ask for budget approval, even though they contributed less than 15 percent of the operating budget. But they literally controlled your budget if they didn’t want to approve your spending plan.”

This unique arrangement was cumbersome from the start and nearly catastrophic before it ended. WACC’s 20-year sponsorship agreement with the school districts was set to expire on July 1, 1985. The districts did not want to continue, arguing that their primary responsibility was K-12 education. While some were interested in paying the college to continue secondary vocational programs to benefit their high school students, they did not wish to sign on for future postsecondary tuition subsidies.

As tensions with the sponsoring districts grew, the college’s operating budget was held hostage by a process that required approval of 20 school boards as well as the college board, which represented district sponsors.

“They would appoint people to the board who would be sensitive to their situation, not necessarily always to the Williamsport Area Community College (although we had some very excellent board members appointed that way),” Breuder said. “We literally had both sides of the neck, both carotid arteries … controlled by the school districts – budget and trustee appointment.”

Since the Carl administration, WACC’s president and chief supporters traveled the 10-county area each year, presenting budget plans and seeking the boards’ approvals. As end of the agreement neared, more districts voted down college spending plans.

Bowers recalled one school board meeting that characterized the animosity.
**Tenacity Tested**

“We went to Warrior Run. It was a winter night. It was snowing. Bob (Breuder) made his presentation. The vote was taken. The vote was ‘No,’” Bowers said.

Not willing to accept the vote, Breuder continued to defend the plan and answer questions.

“They listened. They voted again. It was a better vote … not enough. Voted down a second time.”

But Breuder wasn’t finished.

“Now Bob’s getting into high gear,” Bowers said. “He’s got to convince these people this is the right thing to do…. He gave it his all and, by gosh, he convinced them. They voted ‘Yes’.”

Pleased with their tenacity in getting the crucial third vote, the administrators drove back to campus.

“Next morning, I’m driving to work, have the news on,” Bowers said. “[They’re] talking about Warrior Run School Board turning down the budget…. It turns out they didn’t only have three votes, they had a fourth vote after we left and they turned it down unanimously!”

Despite a tenacious effort to gain support from the districts, it was obvious that WACC needed a new plan for sponsorship.

“They [the districts] didn’t want to continue … but Pennsylvania law required them to retain their sponsorship,” Breuder said. “The only way they could get out was if we would find another willing sponsor. Otherwise, they would have to stay and the relationship would continue to acidify because we spent a lot of time just trying to get them to understand that they had to shoulder their responsibility.”

**Seeking Support**

He approached Lycoming County commissioners with a proposal for the county to replace the school districts as WACC’s sponsor. Twice, the county turned down the opportunity – once when Breuder suggested it and a second time when a group of community leaders selected by the board to serve as the Area Commission on College Sponsorship made a similar proposal.

Members of the original Area Commission on College Sponsorship were: Jack T. Detwiler, vice president of Stroehmann Brothers Co., chairman; Michael R.J. Felix, member of Williamsport City Council, vice chairman; Joseph V. Grieco, former state assemblyman from Jersey Shore; Birch B. Phillips, Phillips Supply House, Williamsport; Robert T. Manley, Pennsylvania Power & Light, Williamsport; and Peyton D. McDonald, vice president, E. F. Hutton.

Breuder supported the commission’s work, hoping to end a longtime conflict that was preventing the college from growing.

“Since the school districts and the college working together, without outside involvement, have been unable to effect a mutual, acceptable alternative, the trustees are looking to the Area Commission on Sponsorship to, not only research the problem, but to come forth with some reasonable, responsible, rational suggestions to alleviate the problem,” he said.

The county was the first, logical potential sponsor – because “it had a larger geographical base and we would disenfranchise fewer students,” Breuder said. But it was the City of Williamsport that finally agreed to accept a proposal to become the temporary, local sponsor and
keep the college open.

“We were right on the edge on more than one occasion,” Breuder said. “[It] was really the 12th hour when the City of Williamsport stepped up with support of then-Mayor Stephen J. Lucasi, who was a champion of it; Randy Hipple, who was president of City Council; tremendous leader Charlie Pagana was there, and Mike Felix. A number of those people understood what WACC meant in terms of economic development and quality of lives. So, we got it done.”

The president admitted it was a “tough sell” that left the college with a very small sponsorship base. Only city residents were eligible to enroll at the sponsor’s one-third tuition rate.

He was encouraged by the passage of variable stipend funding – a measure promoted in the state Legislature by Rep. Alvin C. Bush to help offset increases in tuition for new students living in districts that had previously sponsored the college. Still, for the first time since 1973, enrollment declined 12 percent in Fall 1985.

“We disenfranchised an enormous population of students in north-central Pennsylvania who no longer got the one-third,” Breuder explained. “When that happened, we took a tremendous dive in our enrollment and, of course with that, revenue. So that was our most critical year; we almost hemorrhaged and bled to death that year because we lost significant enrollment because of the change in sponsorship.”

Breuder welcomed students to campus in Fall 1985 with an optimistic message. He reminded them that the college was moving forward, breaking ground for a 153,000-square-foot facility “that could change the future of our college and our community.”

“The new center will enable us to offer such high-technology programs as fiber optics, laser technology, automated manufacturing, computer maintenance and repair, and telecommunications. Comprehensive two-year training programs of this caliber are not offered at any other facility in the eastern United States. The future looks brighter every day here at The Williamsport Area Community College. As we enter our 21st year as a community college, we are strengthened by a rekindled pride in our heritage and a new desire to be the very best moving to the future

Declining enrollments that resulted from a narrowing of WACC’s sponsorship base challenged the administration to find new ways to recruit to potential students.

“I think we are in a transition stage right now,” Dr. William J. Martin, dean of student services, said. “We are moving from the traditional to the future, from local focus … to a national focus in a relatively short amount of time.”

Martin, a native of Williamsport and former Williamsport High School principal, took charge of an all-out effort to use mass marketing to support more traditional admissions recruiting activities.

With contributions from college supporters, staff developed a first multimedia marketing plan that included television commercials, as well as radio and newspaper advertisements, to promote WACC to the general public as “A Different Kind of Campus.”

Among those featured in the advertising campaign were Williamsport’s Mayor Stephen J. Lucasi and WACC student government leader Steven D. Metzker.

“There was no other way to counteract the negative press the college was receiving during the sponsorship dilemma than with face-to-face contact [provided by these testimonials],” Martin said.

The effort paid off. Martin said the administration had anticipated a drop-off of as much as 48 percent, but enrollment declined only 12 percent in the first year of city-only sponsorship. When sponsorship issues were finally resolved in 1989, the college entered a significant growth period, achieving record-breaking enrollments.

Martin’s influence at the institution grew throughout his career. He retired as senior vice president in 2012 and continued serving as a consultant for major college projects on a part-time basis.
we can be – for our students and for our community,” the president declared.

Boldly, in light of the commissioners’ rejection of earlier sponsorship proposals, Breuder returned to Lycoming County requesting funds to support construction of this “flagship” facility.

**Who Is This Guy?**

“I went to Lycoming County and asked them for $5 million. I thought they would choke,” he said. “At the same time, we were in the throes of the sponsorship crisis and we were talking, literally, about the possibility of Williamsport Area Community College going out of business. So I’m sure there were people in the community who looked at me and said, ‘Who is this guy? He’s crazy!’”

Breuder finally convinced the commissioners to say “Yes” – to providing funds to support construction of the new facility.

“We took the $5 million, plus money we had, and some money from the state, and we built the Advanced Technology and Health Sciences Center and that, in and of itself, made an incredible statement in Lycoming County,” Breuder declared.

The statement was heard loud and clear throughout the commonwealth. The center opened in 1987 and, within a year, Gov. Robert P. Casey was in Williamsport to publicly announce a plan to make the college an affiliate of The Pennsylvania State University.

Breuder said his work on an area bank board led him to the idea for a merger. He and a fellow board member discussed the popularity of mergers among banking institutions, and wondered if a merger might provide a way to end the college’s ongoing sponsorship dilemma.

Thoughts of merger caused Breuder to look to the west – toward Penn State.

“If you’re going to merge ... you marry the biggest and the best,” Breuder said. “Merge with someone who can bring something to the table.... So, where else but Penn State University?”


“I’m sure Bob wanted to be there,” said Bowers, Breuder’s executive assistant. “But he set himself – wisely I think – set himself apart from this, realizing the most effective approach would be through the legislators.”

“I didn’t know Bryce Jordan at that time,” Breuder recalled. “But frankly, I didn’t know if Bryce Jordan would want to talk to the president of Williamsport Area Community College. I would find out later on he certainly would have, because I think history will show Bryce Jordan as being one of the extraordinary presidents of Penn State University.”

Jordan sent a team of administrators, led by Steve A. Garban and Dr. Richard E. Grubb, to Williamsport.

“They did their due diligence, found that we had no debt, that we had money in the bank,” Breuder said. “We had a tremendous reputation in terms of the applied technologies.... We’re very much into economic development and quality of life. We would be a perfect fit for Penn State.”

Dr. Breuder outside the Advanced Technology and Health Sciences Center
Le Jeune Chef

During the Breuder administration, Williamsport gained both a revitalized cultural center and a fine-dining restaurant. Le Jeune Chef, a learning laboratory for students, also became “an education in fine dining” for public patrons.

Breuder recalled the impetus for the restaurant was the passion displayed by one faculty member who captured his attention in his early days as president.

“When I first came to Williamsport, the culinary program was in the Klump and Ann Miglio … was cooking in one classroom and serving in another classroom,” Breuder said. “She was so great, so passionate … She was just everything that the college was at that time in terms of great teaching and learning.”

Breuder recognized an opportunity to develop a prominent culinary program to boost the college’s enrollment and marketing potential.

“People are always going to eat,” Breuder declared. “So, even in the worst of times economically, culinary would be one of those programs on which we could build. I also saw the marketing dimension of it – that if we had a
great restaurant that we could market and bring people in … maybe somehow you’d get some support or you’d get something out of it other than just having dinner.”

Miglio shared “a quite vivid memory” of the day Breuder promised to invest in new facilities. She set the scene as “an ancient laboratory overflowing with students, while working a catered event.”

“Dr. Breuder came in to compliment us and, after seeing the crowded facility, told me to start planning a new facility and promised to make it come to fruition. I learned to think BIG.”

Breuder recalled the promise. “I said, ‘Ann, if we build a better facility, are you inclined to go ahead and drive it?’ And she said she would. So that then led to including a new food operation and culinary program in the Hager Lifelong Education Center.

“It came out of the evident commitment that she had back when I first got here,” he said.

Miglio earned the Master Teacher Award, the college’s highest faculty honor, in 1987. She retired in 1993.
**Special Mission**

A perfect fit did not mean fitting an established mold. Penn State, WACC, and the state agreed to create a unique model for higher education at the new Pennsylvania College of Technology.

“The one thing we wanted … was to maintain our independence or individuality,” Breuder declared. “We didn’t want to be absorbed inside the framework of Penn State. We didn’t want to become a branch campus or the College of Technology inside Penn State.”

He said the Penn State team concurred: “Bring it on board, have it become part of the family; but let’s create a special relationship.”

On July 1, 1985, Gov. Casey, who Breuder called a “tremendous champion” of the affiliation, signed legislation establishing Penn College as a special mission affiliate of Penn State, committed to applied technology education.

Rep. Bush, a member of the delegation that proposed the idea to Penn State, suggested the college would become “one of the most significant institutions in the entire commonwealth.”

“The college intends to be the kind of willing, capable partner in this great enterprise that will make Penn State ‘Penn College proud,’” Breuder vowed.

Penn State’s president said, “The affiliation promises new vigor for Pennsylvania in terms of technology transfer, a technologically superior workforce, and overall economic development.”

Jordan also predicted Penn College would become “an exciting new center of resources and opportunities that will serve serious students, researchers, business, and government throughout the Commonwealth.”

Before he retired in 1990, Jordan came to Williamsport to celebrate. He spoke at convocation in Fall 1989 and he returned in May to accept the College Service Award. He again praised the affiliation as “a great opportunity to be creative and responsive in the delivery of programs and services.”

WACC’s former President William H. Feddersen was pleased the affiliation brought an end to sponsorship issues that he felt had limited the college’s growth potential from its inception.

“It made sense,” Feddersen said. “It was a natural evolution and I was very happy that there was a solution to this problem, because we hadn’t worked it out when I left and it was something that had to be worked out.”

Feddersen had attempted to attract more sponsoring districts during his tenure, in an effort to spread the cost over a larger base, and to expand the statewide influence of WACC because “we already have the statewide programs.”

He recalled suggestions as early as 1975 to change the college name to include “Pennsylvania” as a reflection of its statewide impact. He said the administration looked to New York’s Rochester Institute of Technology as an example of a possible new direction for WACC.

“We thought that might be a model for us, maybe we should have some baccalaureate programs, maybe we should become the RIT of Pennsylvania … Pennsylvania Institute of Technology,” Feddersen said.

He said the plan was not divulged to the public to avoid problems with existing sponsors.

“We didn’t talk about this publicly at the time, because the sponsor districts might at that time say, ‘OK, that’s it.’” But we knew the possibility. We had to have a backup plan that we might work toward that would save the kind of programs that were serving the school districts, serving the population, serving the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.”

The Penn State affiliation opened the doors for Penn College to develop four-year programs and create a residential student experience with on-campus housing.

Breuder said four-year degrees were “a perfect fit for us, because generally upper-division baccalaureate work is less expensive to deliver than lower-division baccalaureate work in the applied technologies. So, from a business point of view, it was perfect.”

“We had the skill inside – with the people,” he added. “We had the laboratories, the software, every ingredient…. We went to those disciplines where the supply and demand was existent and we weren’t engaging in unnecessary duplication or competition.”

The first baccalaureate degrees, added in 1992, were successful. Within five years, 17 percent of Penn College students were enrolled in a variety of Bachelor of Science
degree majors.

“That shook the foundation of Middle States,” Breuder recalled. “They sent a team in for special accreditation as a baccalaureate, not believing that any college could conceivably crystallize that many, that quickly, and be successful.... We came up with a sterling report.”

In the college’s 1990-91 annual report, Breuder affirmed, “I am not a person who likes to be told something important ‘can’t be done.’ I am not one to take ‘No’ for an answer. I do not believe in allowing limitations to set the course for our future. We set ourselves apart, I believe, when we exhibit the courage to seek out new solutions.”

Center Stage

Affiliation also made it possible to expand facilities. The college made its first municipal bond offering in 1990, gaining $31.75 million to finance construction of the Alvin C. Bush Campus Center and the Kathryn Wentzel Lumley Aviation Center – facilities dedicated in honor of distinguished college board members. At the same time, private developers constructed student housing at the edge of the campus.

While construction took center stage on campus, Breuder stepped into the public spotlight with a project in downtown Williamsport.

The college was considering building a theater on campus when a local philanthropist, Mary Lib Stockwell, contacted Breuder and asked him to consider, instead, purchasing and refurbishing an old theater in the heart of the city.

Breuder recalled asking her, “What makes you think I can do that?” and getting her reply, “Well, you’ve got the personality for it.”

“I was often in the early years referred to as the bull in the china closet, the guy who takes no prisoners,” Breuder said. “And yet, isn’t it interesting in the end, when they wanted somebody to get to the Capitol Theatre, who did they come to?”

The president “took it as a compliment and a challenge” and went ahead, convincing the owners to sell and leading a communitywide fundraising effort for renovation and construction.

Speaking to a community group in 1991, Breuder said no construction project he ever worked on “has been more difficult to bring to fruition than this one.”

Among the challenges were vacating the former owners so construction could begin, rebidding the project when original cost estimates were too high, and managing a schedule impacted by contractor delays.

“There are times I wish I had never started with it, but I am absolutely convinced this will be the best thing for Williamsport,” he said.

He publicly fired back at critics who claimed the distressed downtown was not a desirable location to attract an audience to a cultural entertainment center.

“If you want something to be better, you have to make it better. It may take a year or two, but good things don’t happen overnight,” Breuder asserted.

Some questioned the idea that an arts center could uplift the downtown; but the Williamsport Sun-Gazette, located next-door to the theater, suggested, “Even in his most flowery oratory, Breuder has seldom overstated one of his visions, and almost all of them have come true.”

Breuder earned a standing ovation when the Community Arts Center opened in 1993. He ranked the project among his top accomplishments, next to the Penn State affiliation, and the transformation of the campus and culture. In 1998, he received the Community Arts Center’s Visionary Award.

Patrick D. Murphy, an art professor who earned the Master Teacher honor in 1989, credited Breuder with shepherding the project through its completion.

“He possessed a tough cosmopolitan leadership style, but he was innovative and a builder,” Murphy said. “He was responsible for extensive building project on campus and the development and restoration of the Community Arts Center.”

Continuing Quest

As Breuder continued a “quest to be Pennsylvania’s premier technical college,” the college began to attract significant state and federal funding; an all-time high of $4.3 million in grant funding was received in 1995-96.

Penn College created the nation’s most comprehensive “tech prep” and “school-to-work” initiative
encouraging high school students to pursue careers that would meet real workforce needs of the 21st century.

Technology transfer efforts – including a Plastics Manufacturing Center to provide industry partners access to the college’s state-of-the-art technology resources – continued to build the college’s reputation for impacting economic development.

Still, Breuder battled for support when the college began to purchase properties adjacent to campus in order to expand. He faced harsh, public criticism for removing properties from the tax rolls in order to carry out plans to build college-owned housing and create a landmark entrance to campus.

In response, he signed an agreement with the City of Williamsport to provide police cruisers and tuition waivers for city employees, valued at $50,000 per year, to offset lost tax revenue.

The Williamsport Sun-Gazette once declared the 1980s “The Decade of Dr. Bob” and described the president as “a leader with vision.” In 1997, it claimed he often “ruffled feathers.”

Breuder acknowledged a love-hate relationship with the media. “I probably have more column entries in the Sun-Gazette than anybody,” he quipped.

“I’m from Queens, N.Y., coming in and turning everything upside-down in terms of the way we do business – and maybe not always doing it with the greatest finesse – but to go in and get it done,” he admitted. “What happened over time is that people saw the results, whether it was the Arts Center or the conversion or whatever. And then the naysayers, the critics … would eventually become fewer and less intense. I don’t know that the Sun-Gazette ever gave me a break in 17 years, but that’s beside the point.”
Trial and Triumph

On Friday, September 5, 1997, the Sun-Gazette carried a front-page, banner headline that read “Breuder Leaving Penn College, Tenure Marked by Trial and Triumph.”

The president submitted his resignation three days earlier to Rep. Bush, chairman of the college’s board of directors. The chairman noted his appreciation in a personal response.

“The progress that has been made at Penn College during your 17-year stewardship has been truly remarkable. Your leadership, along with the work of many others, has taken it from being a beleaguered community college to its position of pre-eminence in its chosen field.”

Lycoming County Commissioner Carl A. Curchoe agreed. He was quoted in the Sun-Gazette:

“We had our good times and bad times. But I think it’s probably typical throughout the country that movers and shakers do make a lot of enemies. I think it’s something that probably goes with being an innovator.”

Future Anchored

Breuder called his Penn College experience “bittersweet.” He moved to Illinois and continued to build a legacy as a community college president, beginning at William Rainey Harper College.

Reflecting on his move to Harper, he said, “I probably go to … organizations that need some special attention, somebody who has got the courage, the conviction, the stamina, the perseverance, the willingness to make the difficult decision – decisions that are often not popular, but decisions which have to be made.”

It can be difficult to lead change in a new environment, he said.

“When you first come to an institution and you effect a lot of change, it’s unsettling for some people. They’re still comfortable with what they have, so even moving to something better takes awhile…. In the early years of your presidency, you generally walk alone.”

After 10 years at Harper, Breuder considered retirement. He chose instead to accept the presidency of one of the nation’s largest community colleges. He arrived at the College of DuPage in Illinois – which enrolls more than 30,000 students – in 2009.

“I’m still in the walking-alone stage,” he said. “Fortunately, I know from past practice, that if I make good decisions here and I replicate what I did previously, that in a year or so … people will look and say, ’Wow, good trade.’”

After leading three colleges over 30 years, Breuder still acknowledged a special love for the first.

“I remember when I left Williamsport … driving on Route 220 … I saw the campus and I said, ’We came a long way.’ I looked up on Morgan Valley, which you could see in the cutout in the mountain there, had a tear roll down my cheek and I realized that I was leaving the love of my life.”

What did this agent for change learned through his years of experience as a leader?

“I’ve seen it all … in one flavor or another over the last 31 years,” he said. “So that makes me feel like I’m in a good place right now and I can benefit from all of that and not make mistakes that I made before. I can approach it differently.”

“Everything doesn’t have to be right up the middle,” he reminded. “Sometimes you just lay the ball down or you hand it off to somebody else…. In the old days, everything was right up the middle, you know. Boom. If you are in my way, I’m going to mow you down. I’m going to get there and the rest of you … follow me…. We got it done, but we left a lot of stuff on the field when it was over.”

Looking back, Breuder expresses admiration for the people who worked with him through the challenging and gratifying years in Williamsport.

“I think of all the people I worked with … who stayed the course … who put away the differences of opinion that we had … and we created this masterpiece that, in the end, people can be proud of.”

Widely acknowledged for making Penn College immeasurably better, Breuder is proud that he left the institution in a position of strength.

“Its future is anchored,” he affirmed.
“People make the difference.”
The driving force behind an unprecedented campus expansion, Dr. Robert L. Breuder, announced plans to leave Pennsylvania College of Technology in September 1997. He spent 17 years building the deteriorating physical plant of the former Williamsport Area Community College into a $109 million campus with a Penn State affiliation.

The first chairman of the Penn College Board of Directors, Alvin C. Bush, who remained a strong supporter after resigning as chair in 1997, said, “Dr. Breuder will leave indelible footprints behind him that will never be forgotten in this community.”

While Breuder’s footprints were not forgotten, his successor – who “learned a lot from him” – determined early on that she would walk a different path, crossing bridges to reconnect the college and the community.

Dr. Davie Jane Gilmour, who was chief academic officer in Breuder’s administration, became president of Penn College in May 1998. She served through the previous eight months as interim leader, while the board conducted a national search for a new president.

“We had not been as connected … at that time with the community … as I thought we should have been,” Gilmour stated. “So I made it a big priority … to make sure that we reached out and we were more involved in the community activities.”

Veronica M. Muzic, who succeeded her as vice president for academic affairs and provost, said Gilmour immediately made relationships the hallmark of her presidency.

“Feddersen focused on academics. Breuder focused on facilities and money. Davie focused on making us part of the community and restoring a focus on the human element,” she said. “Each brought something different to the table, and that’s normal.”

“She’s been here a long time. She had a lot of credibility. A lot of people on the campus liked her.”

Dunham was committed to appropriately transitioning leadership of the institution, which had been guided for 17 years by an intrepid, commanding public figure.

“We’ve got a critical situation on our hands,” he said. “We’ve got to provide some leadership that will tell the people in this community, the faculty, and the staff that things are going to be ok.”

People got the message. Gilmour received unanimous approval of the board and a standing ovation when she accepted the position “on behalf of the faculty, staff, and students … because it will be all of us working together to make Penn College an even better place in the future.”

From the beginning, Gilmour established her administration as one committed to the “dignity and worth of all individuals.” With an oft-repeated theme of “People make the difference,” she inspired students, faculty, and staff to offer their best in service to each other and the greater community.

Gilmour’s path to the presidency began in 1977 when she was encouraged by her father to consider a faculty opening at WACC.

“This will be a great job for you,” she recalled him saying after he saw an advertisement for the position in a Harrisburg newspaper. At that time, she worked as a dental hygienist at offices in Carlisle, Boiling Springs, and Camp Hill.

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“Experience and Affection

Gilmour was a seasoned academic administrator who professed a deep, personal affection for the institution and its people. She began her career as a member of the WACC faculty. Twenty years of experience in academics – from the classroom through department-level administrative assignments to leadership positions as provost and interim president – made her an ideal candidate, among the nearly 200 applicants for the presidency.

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She became “enamored” with the field of dental hygiene in eighth or ninth grade. She liked the idea of
“transforming people’s lives … allowing them to smile with more pride.”

“I had braces as a young girl…. So I spent a lot of time in the dental office and at the orthodontist,” Gilmour recalled.

**Encouraged by Parents**

She enjoyed math and science, was intrigued by dental hygiene, and was encouraged by her parents to pursue a college degree.

“I remember very early, it was established in my home that you would go to college. There was no question, you’re going to go to college,” she declared.

“My Mom taught first grade for over 35 years. I always wanted to do some kind of teaching,” she said. “So when I started to search for colleges, I looked for colleges that offered degrees in the teaching of dental hygiene.”

She selected West Liberty State College in West Virginia, where she earned associate and bachelor’s degrees. She was considering graduate school when her father presented the idea of applying at WACC.

Her first – and only – attempt to land a teaching job nearly stalled. She was traveling abroad when the invitation came for an interview at WACC. Her father caught up with her while she was visiting her sister in England.

“Call them back, Dad, and tell them I’m not coming home. If they haven’t called me since March, they’ll wait another week for me to get home from England,” she replied. “I guess the rest is history,” she added, “because in November I started working here.”

She began working in a program that did not yet exist. Her first months were spent developing the dental hygiene curriculum for students who would begin classes in January.

“I was intrigued by the idea of being on the ground floor … being the first faculty member in that program. That was really exciting to me,” Gilmour said. “I liked the ability to create something…. We were literally building a clinic.”

She worked under the tutelage of Dr. Robert G. Bowers, who was director of WACC’s math, science, and allied health division.

“Davie – from day one – just had the highest commitment to instruction and to standards,” Bowers said. “I knew once she began to teach that she had what I would characterize as a relentless commitment to quality.”

**Standards and Commitment**

Her commitment and high standards were matched by energy and enthusiasm for her subject and her students.

Gilmour recalls the challenge of teaching one class in the infamous, antiquated “Unit 6” – a former trolley car barn – across the street from her regular station on the fourth floor of the Academic Center.

“I would load up my three-tiered media cart with all of my stuff and I’d walk across Third Street to go to the trolley car barn to teach,” she said. “I would go in early and turn the lights on so any critters (left over from the evening) would go away before my students came in. But you know what? It didn’t matter because we had great equipment and we had great students, so we made it work…. I’m sure there are still faculty colleagues of mine who remember me trucking across the street with my media cart.”

Faculty and staff colleagues did take notice.
A “center of excellence” for decades, the dental hygiene program, which launched the career of Dr. Davie Jane Gilmour, was nearly eliminated in the concept development stage.

On June 3, 1973, WACC Vice President C. Herschel Jones announced a moratorium on new program development. But he decided not to halt work already in progress to develop a dental hygiene program.

In the memo to the faculty curriculum committee, he wrote, “Before making any final conclusion on the merits of similar action with respect to the dental hygiene program, I shall ascertain what commitments or legal obligations we have incurred in agreement with institutions who would be involved, grants and funding agencies whose funds we have already used…. I would also like to know what investment in time and money we have put into requisite planning for remodeling the fourth floor, Klump. The needs and desires of the community, as expressed through the Dental Hygienist Advisory Committee are also important to know. I shall take immediate steps to obtain this information and shall be in touch with you as soon as possible.”

Weeks later, Jones was appointed to lead the institution when Dr. Kenneth E. Carl resigned. Several years went by before the college announced, under Dr. William H. Feddersen in 1977, that it would become the third Pennsylvania community college to offer a program in dental hygiene.

Dr. Robert G. Bowers, then director of the math, science, and allied health division when the program launched, said, “Kenny Carl … was interested in starting (dental hygiene) … but that did not come to pass. Bill Feddersen thought this was an area that there might be some need. We did a needs assessment and that certainly did show us that there was employment both locally and across the state. I think there were two other dental hygiene programs – one in Harrisburg and one in Philadelphia. So, it was an unmet need in the state of Pennsylvania and Feddersen … decided it would be something that would happen. And of course I was given the challenge to make it happen.”

Feddersen told the *Spotlight* student newspaper in Fall 1977 that WACC received $127,127 in federal grants and $104,630 in nonfederal funding to start the program. Davie Jane (Saxton) Gilmour was the first faculty member hired to develop curriculum and teach students when the program started in January 1978 in a 12-station clinic on the fourth floor of Klump Academic Center.

Bowers said, “I’m very proud of the fact that we did get a dental hygiene program started and it became a center of excellence. It was something that Dr. Feddersen, and then later, Dr. Breuder would always point to with pride.”
“I knew, I would say within three months, that we had hired a star,” Bowers said. “Every institution has its stars and I knew that Davie Jane was a star…. Did I anticipate she’d be president of this college? No. But I began to think about it as I saw her move through the ranks.”

Gilmour said her movement through the ranks was not always planned.

“I applied for that first job (dental hygiene faculty) and I applied for the job that I have today (president). In the middle, it was circumstantial,” she explained.

Gilmour accepted her first administrative assignment when a search for a new coordinator of dental hygiene failed. During a meeting with faculty colleagues, she agreed to accept the job for a year.

“I’ll try it and, if you don’t like the way I do it, it’s only a year and we’ll undo it,” she promised.

They liked it. She continued working in administration while completing graduate studies at Penn State.

“I saw what a difference I could make as an administrator. While I missed teaching … I could make a difference in a different way,” Gilmour recalled. “My goal was to remove the obstacles and barriers so the faculty and students could really accomplish what they set out to do.”

Success and Challenge

Her success went beyond the dental hygiene department. She became director of the health sciences division and later associate dean of instruction. She was a leader in planning facilities and developing curriculum for the Advanced Technology and Health Sciences Center, a facility showcasing emerging technologies.

“Those who know me well know that I need to be challenged and I need to be able to problem-solve,” Gilmour declared. “I really wanted to move to the next step and see what was there. It wasn’t so much what would the next job be, but it was more what was the next challenge.”

She stood with faculty and administration colleagues through a tremendous challenge, when the potential loss of 20 school districts’ sponsorship threatened to close WACC in the 1980s.

“I had a great group of friends then who worked at the college and we were determined that, no matter what, the college was going to stay open,” Gilmour said. “We were determined to find a way.”

Despite the uncertainty, Gilmour said, “There was never gloom and doom. There was never sadness. There was always [the idea that], ‘We’ll figure this out.’”

By the time the City of Williamsport agreed to take on the sponsor role to keep the college open, she and many colleagues had forged a strong, lasting bond.

“I believe for those of us who were here, it created this common thread. Just like silver or gold, it can’t be broken,” she said.

Still, she acknowledged that the hard work of securing the college’s future had only just begun.

“We could celebrate,” Gilmour remarked. “But we had to wake up the next morning and we had to be the best institution we could be…. We were one-of-a-kind and we knew that…. Now we had to demonstrate it – demonstrate quality, demonstrate our mission, and really make a mark for ourselves.”

Landmark Affiliation

When an opportunity came to affiliate with Penn State, Gilmour saw “this had the potential to be a landmark activity that might be the first of its kind and perhaps the first and only time it’s ever done.”

While not directly involved in negotiating the merger, Gilmour said she was part of many “What if?” conversations during that time.

“If we did this, then we could offer baccalaureate degrees. If we did this, we could have more residence life. If we did this, then we could have all this,” she recalled.

While excited about the potential for a merger, she also had concerns about how the cultures of the two institutions would blend.

“For me, it was a lot like a blind date,” Gilmour said. “Are they going to like us? Are we going to like them?”

As then dean of instruction, she was protective of WACC’s agility in developing curriculum to meet emerging workforce needs – especially during a time when new technologies were introduced regularly into every workplace.
“The only way this institution – from its very beginning until today – has been able to be responsive to business and industry, responsive to community needs, and responsive to workforce needs, is to be agile … and the only way to be agile is to not be hamstrung by processes and procedures that can get in your way,” she declared.

When legislation formalizing the affiliation was enacted in July 1989, it maintained Penn College’s independence in curriculum development and overall governance.

“We are part of the family, which means a lot; but we’re independent as an organization, which also means a lot,” she explained.

The Penn State affiliation was a turning point in the history of the institution, she said.

“I still have a tablet that’s somewhat faded that says, ‘I survived the merger,’” she shared. “It worked out beautifully, of course, but it was an interesting time.”

When the affiliation marked its 20th anniversary in 2009, Gilmour reflected, “I can truly say that we have seen the blueprint come to life. The benefits we had hoped the affiliation would provide – to students, to the community, and to business and industry – have been realized.”

One of those benefits was the development of four-year degrees. Gilmour and the college’s chief academic officer, Dr. James E. Middleton, created the college’s first baccalaureate degrees by expanding upon associate degree programs that were considered “centers of excellence.” The first baccalaureate was in dental hygiene.

To avoid duplication of degrees offered around the state, Gilmour said they had to consider, “What elements do we want … [to] say a Penn College baccalaureate degree is special? It’s separate. It’s different. It’s different than everybody else.”

A work-savvy faculty and continued emphasis on hands-on, applied technology education were deemed essential in planning unique, new degrees. An early obstacle, she said was “finding people in the field who could teach. We didn’t want teaching assistants. We didn’t want people who had no hands-on experience. But we wanted them to be able to teach upper-level classes.”

Upper-level classes were in place to support the first baccalaureate programming in 1992.

**Academic at Heart**

“For somebody like me who is a true academic at heart,” Gilmour said, “that (developing baccalaureate degrees) was some of the most rewarding work I’ve done.”

When Middleton left the college in 1996, Gilmour was named vice president for academic affairs and provost. In her first year as chief academic officer, Penn College offered 22 baccalaureate degrees, employed 236 full-time faculty, and enrolled 5,000 students.

“I was happy. I was challenged. I was busy and I was finishing my degree. I was satisfied with everything that I was doing,” she said. “I had no expectation that the current president was leaving and, so, as I was finishing my graduate work, I started to think about what’s next for me.”

She attended several seminars for women who might be interested in being college presidents. There, she said, while most attendees were clearly on track for the post, she was not as certain.

“I’m very happy where I am … I’m just not sure,” she recalled. “But I think I owe it to myself to explore the idea. That’s really where I was when that transition opportunity came.”

When Breuder announced he was leaving Penn College, the board asked Gilmour to step into a role as interim chief operating officer. The invitation, she said, left her “speechless.”

“I think they were looking for somebody with strong academic experience. I think it purely had to do with my academic experience.”

She accepted the role with some trepidation.

“There was this sense of excitement, but there was a nice, healthy balance of humility and being overwhelmed a little bit and wondering how I was going to navigate the next several months,” she recalled.

One concern that she had to overcome was how to manage her professional relationships as she stepped into the interim leadership role.
CHOOSEING THREE LEADERS

Dr. Robert G. Bowers had the unique opportunity to serve on presidential search committees that recommended the hiring of three of the institution’s leaders – Drs. William G. Feddersen, Robert L. Breuder, and Davie Jane Gilmour.

After more than 40 years in the classroom at Williamsport Area Community College and Pennsylvania College of Technology, Bowers received the highest faculty honor, the Master Teacher Award, and was granted professor emeritus status in 2007.

“I’ve held five positions at Penn College, some administrative and some faculty,” Bowers said. “The most interesting, varied, exciting was … executive assistant for internal affairs…. The most rewarding and the most important were my 41 years of teaching.”

Bowers joined the mathematics faculty in 1966. In 1979, he achieved the rank of professor and became involved in faculty contract negotiations. The following year, he accepted a half-time position as assistant to the president for legal and labor matters. He also served for a time as director of the math, science, and allied health division.

After a short term as dean of academic affairs, Bowers took on a new role as executive assistant to the president for internal affairs – a position he held for 11 years before returning full time to the classroom.

“The 17 years that I was in administration … one thing I’m proud of – and often it was the highlight of my day – I continued to teach…. There was never a year that I did not teach at least one course.”

Based upon his unique vantage point, Bowers described the institution’s leaders who had served during his years at the college.

“Kenny Carl, father. Bill Feddersen, enabled transition to a full community college. Bob Breuder, builder and enabler of Pennsylvania State University relationship. Davie Gilmour enabled continued growth, support, and respect. And I think – if you think about the history of each of these people – each of these individuals was there at the right time for this institution.”
Managing Relationships

“I had to reorient my thinking. How am I now going to lead this group of people that I’ve worked with as a peer and a colleague? How was I going to shift that? What kind of message was I going to give to the college community? Presidential transitions are often times of uncertainty on college campuses and I knew that. So how was I going to convey stability and mission-centeredness when, at the same time, I couldn’t answer the question, ‘Who was going to be the next president?’”

She decided to put herself into consideration for the job. She accepted the interim position and applied for the permanent appointment.

“I thought I had skills and ability and the personality to bring something to the institution that I believe it needed at the time…. I threw my hat in the ring,” she said, expecting that “life as I knew it was going to be different forever.”

“I truly believed that the board of directors was going to want an outside person and so I had to make a decision. In my mind, when I decided to apply, I was making a decision to leave the institution if I wasn’t chosen,” she confessed.

Later, she said: “It would have been very hard to leave here because of that gold and silver thread [forged during the sponsorship crisis]. It would be very hard to leave here after being on the ground floor of the new Pennsylvania College of Technology…. Maybe I would have.”

For months, Gilmour led Penn College under the close scrutiny of the board and her peers. She called upon her father’s memory to guide her.

“My father taught me early in life that you have to like your own skin. And, if you can live in your own skin and you like it, then you really don’t have to worry about too many other things. So I just went about doing my job…. I just gave it 150 percent, and I didn’t really think about the job interview. I didn’t really think about the whole concept of the search process. I just thought about what was important to get done for the institution at that time.”

On May 4, 1998, the board of directors appointed the college’s first woman president. State Sen. Roger A. Madigan, a member of the board, called it a “historic day for Penn College.” Gilmour accepted the historical context, but downplayed the significance of her gender.

“I grew up believing that the best person gets the job, the person who has the best skills and abilities. And I’ve never seen gender in that respect. And so, you know, I respect the fact that it’s a milestone for women that I became the first woman president. But I became president.”

Coincidentally, the man who hired Gilmour for her first position at the college was the one who delivered her to the boardroom for the official announcement.

“I was sent to fetch her,” Bowers said. “She and Bill Martin (senior vice president) were in the office up on the second floor, where the president’s office was. That was a very special day for me.”

Gilmour confessed that Bowers’ arrival offered a glimpse of what was to come.

“I never count my chickens, never,” she said. “When they sent him to get me, I kind of thought, ‘ok, well that’s a good sign…’ I remember he was beaming and yet he wasn’t saying anything, because he clearly wasn’t supposed to say anything.”

She entered the boardroom “jammed with people” and accepted her appointment with humility.

“This is truly an honor for me,” she said. “But it takes more than one person to make a college strong. Together, with a shared vision for our future, we will do our best to serve our students and our community into the 21st century.”

Bowers, who served on the presidential search committee, declared she was clearly the best candidate for the job.

“Davie was not anointed to this position,” Bowers said. “She earned the presidency. She earned it in two ways. She was the best candidate after doing a national search. And we had validated through experience, some of her style and philosophy as she was acting president.”

Board member Carol Herrmann agreed, “We looked far and wide for the absolute best person for this college … and we were delighted with the quality of the candidates.”
**Moving Into Action**

Gilmour’s years of experience at the institution allowed her to move into action quickly. She called her familiarity with the college and its people a “huge advantage.”

“You knew where all the bodies were buried,” she laughed. “You knew where all the issues and problems were. You knew if you had a problem or an issue or a challenge or a new project, you knew whom to go call on and ask to do it for you because you knew their track records. You knew they could deliver.”

The fact that she knew many people at the college very well also became a personal challenge.

“I had been friends with people for years who felt like now, because of their positions at the institution, the friendship or the relationship had to take a new level, a step back if you will… that, if they continued to be my friend, in the way they were, that it would be seen as favoritism. I recognized that as well. So everybody got a little distant until they figured things out. That fishbowl life came to be. You and I could have gone to dinner two weeks before that and nobody would have noticed and, if we went to dinner two weeks after that, everybody would have noticed.”

Many in the community noticed the new president made a special effort to reach out to local nonprofits, business leaders, and others to strengthen Penn College ties to Williamsport and Lycoming County. Few understood how challenging the social aspects of the position were for her.

“The hardest thing for me to do the day I became president was to make small talk with a group of people I did not know,” Gilmour confessed. “I’ve really had to work very hard to overcome that. People don’t believe that when I tell them. But it’s very difficult for me.”

She learned that preparation was key to success in developing her public persona.

“No matter how busy you are, you have to stop and prepare. That’s the key … don’t take it for granted,” she said. “You won’t ever find me giving a speech without a piece of paper in front of me…. I respect you or the group I’m talking to more than that – to write on a cocktail napkin or wing it. I won’t do that. Preparation is the really key piece.”

Interacting on campus – especially with students – came much more naturally to her than the public speaking engagements. Rather than celebrate a formal inauguration, Gilmour chose the August 1998 convocation as her official induction ceremony. On that day, she coached students on the significance of their new start.

“Today we begin an enormous undertaking…. I will not mislead you. There will be many times when you will be truly challenged. It is our job to do that. There will be many times when you will be intellectually stimulated. It is our goal to provide that. There will be many times when you will be pushed to maximize your potential. This, in the final analysis, is our measure of success.”

Muzic cited Gilmour’s first official act as president – establishing a sliding fee scale for the on-campus Children’s Learning Center so that students could afford quality, convenient child care – as an example of her commitment to students. She also appreciated the new president’s compassionate leadership and confidence in the staff.

“She tolerated a lot,” Muzic said. “She allowed you to make mistakes knowing full well that you’re smart enough to make the corrections, learn from the experience and move on.”

The board chairman agreed.

“She takes good people, nurtures them, makes them better, makes them feel proud of what they’re doing, and makes them feel very much an important part of this organization,” Dunham said. “She doesn’t have a big ego…. Her decision-making is based upon what’s good for students.”

Gilmour called Dunham a “steadying force” whose leadership helped to nurture her administration.

“His ability to create this strength of presence and really this confidence and this ability to let everybody know that Penn State is here in a really positive way … was a big piece of my early days as president,” she said.
Milestone Anniversary

During Gilmour’s first year as president, the college celebrated a milestone “Diamond 10” anniversary – marking 85 years in Williamsport and 10 years as an affiliate of Penn State. The event, which Gilmour said would prove “history has not been forgotten here,” was a perfect opportunity to honor the institution’s heritage and invite the community to campus. Among the guests attending the anniversary celebration was former WACC President Kenneth E. Carl.

“We are proud of our history and of a tradition that sets us apart from others in higher education,” Gilmour said. “We have roots deeply planted in this community. We are not, nor should we be, a gated community unto itself.”

Her first year in office was a whirlwind of activity as she divided her time between campus and community activities, and forged stronger ties with the Penn State administration and the state Legislature.

“I wanted the college to reconnect to the local community,” Gilmour recalls. “I would not say that the college had burned its bridges in the community, but we certainly had not walked on them for quite some time. It was my primary goal during the first year of my administration to cross those bridges once again.”

She accepted many invitations to meet and greet people – from government officials to elementary and high school students. She volunteered for local causes and encouraged employees and students to do the same.

She became a mentor for young women seeking careers in community service. She spoke to graduating classes and to single parents and homemakers who were looking for motivation to achieve their goals. She became the face of an institution committed to serving its community.

Gilmour was also frequently quoted by the local media on matters of education, community service, and economic development. She became a leader in the Williamsport-Lycoming Chamber of Commerce and an advocate for business, government and education partnerships.
**Good Stewards**

Testifying at a legislative hearing in February 1998, Gilmour affirmed, “Our faculty and staff are committed to being good stewards of public funds and public trust.” Penn College took the lead in developing state-funded, school-to-work programs that provided career awareness, technical preparation, and industry connections in public secondary schools. It became home to the state’s largest Tech Prep consortium, introducing middle and high school students to careers that would keep the workforce competitive into the 21st century.

Gilmour believed that expanding the college’s outreach beyond the local region – while staying firmly rooted in the community – would continue the legacy of the institution’s founders.

“Like the architects behind the famous Williamsport...
Plan, we believe others can and should benefit from the programs we have developed,” she said. “We believe we are doing something right here in Williamsport … and we have been doing so for a long time.”

Gov. Tom Ridge agreed, “They’ve got the 21st century relationship between education and business. The model of the 21st century school … is making sure that your curriculum prepares your students for jobs. They’ve been doing that for quite some time.”

Gilmour used every opportunity to remind business and government leaders that Penn College was a statewide asset that could make a real difference in revitalizing the economy.

“Our efforts have earned us a place at the table when the state’s economic development is at issue,” she declared.

Regional economic outlook reports in 1999 and 2000 confirmed her assessment by naming Penn College the area’s chief asset. Penn State officials also continued to tout the value of the institution; the university’s president said Penn College was “perhaps the greatest success story in Pennsylvania higher education.”

That story convinced a Penn State alumnus, who was a native of Williamsport, to present Penn College with its largest individual gift to date in 1999. The anonymous donation of more than $840,000 was used to build an entranceway to campus from Maynard Street, located just off the well-traveled Route 180 and 220 highways.

Construction of the entrance, on blighted land that held the remains of an abandoned factory, was the “fulfillment of a dream,” according to former board Chairman Bush. He and others believed the formal entrance had “the potential to change the character of this campus.”

Five years later, Gilmour would point to the new entranceway as a catalyst for private business development in the area that followed.

“All one needs to do is to look at the Maynard Street expansion and ask, ‘Without Penn College, would any of this have happened?’” she told the Williamsport Sun-Gazette in 2004. “For two decades, a rust-belt eyesore was the focal point in this area of the city. The college purchased the property and spent years turning it into a point of pride. People in the community tell me how good they feel when they drive by the campus entrance, see the American flag flying high, and know the changes that have taken place in this part of our city. The college’s vision began a rebirth that brought new businesses and turned Maynard Street – a street we once avoided when traveling around the city – into a thoroughfare that inspires community pride.”

In addition to a new campus entrance, a new Field House and renovated Herman T. Schneebeli Earth Science Center were completed in 1999. The Field House plus the purchase of student housing, originally built by private developers on the edge of campus, put Penn College on the path to becoming a true residential campus.

Gilmour encouraged students to consider the campus their home and to use campus amenities not only to help them learn, but also to increase social interactions and enhance their leadership skills.

“Students can access all our facilities. Students go to Morgan Valley. Students can have meetings and eat dinner in the Victorian House. Students are regulars in Le Jeune Chef, “ she said. “I love being with students. I love having lunch with them or visiting with them or, when I get to go and make a presentation with them, or just walking around campus and talking to them.”

Gilmour practiced hospitality throughout the campus, inviting students, alumni, industry and government leaders, and members of the community to become more familiar with the facilities, programs, and offerings of Penn College. She also encouraged an expansion of student activities in order to engage and inspire the growing residential population.

“Dr. Breuder had done a miraculous transformation of the physical plant at that point in time. We had done the baccalaureate degrees. We needed to focus on students and student affairs and some of those kinds of things a little bit more,” Gilmour stated. “We had a really healthy organization. We just had to shift a few things.”
**Arboretum Honors Master Teacher**

A master teacher was honored with the naming of the Richard J. Weilminster Arboretum at the Schneebeli Earth Science Center in 2008. Weilminster retired in 2006 after a 34-year career as a professor of horticulture.

The 1996 recipient of the Master Teacher Award also earned some of the industry’s highest honors, including the L.C. Chadwick Educators Award, a national collegiate teaching award presented by the American Nursery and Landscape Association, and the Pennsylvania Landscape Nursery Association’s highest honor, the Frederick J. Mummert Distinguished Service Award.

In tribute to Weilminster, President Davie Jane Gilmour said, “He has planted countless seeds – in gardens and in the minds of his students. He has planted countless trees – to provide shade and beauty and understanding. He has truly left a mark on humanity through his teaching and his love of trees, gardens, nature, and his students.”

**Community Embraces Flag**

A centerpiece of Penn College’s main entrance is a majestic, 1,800 square-foot American flag, maintained by a community group spearheaded by Senior Vice President William J. Martin and local resident Anthony DiSalvo. The flag became a vital anchor for the community on Sept. 11, 2001.

“In the swirl of sadness and fear … we hung onto the familiar,” said Dr. Davie Jane Gilmour, recalling that, just before the 9/11 attacks, the flag had been removed for repairs.

“The first calls we got were from people asking, ‘Where’s the flag?’” she said. “It’s such a part of the community and can be seen from so many places that we had to scramble and get a replacement.”

Students, faculty, staff, and local residents gathered around the flag to mourn the loss of lives in an unprecedented terrorist attack on the homeland.

Following President George W. Bush’s call for the country to stand united and maintain normal operations in communities not directly affected by crisis, the college remained open. Only the Lumley Aviation Center, at the Williamsport Regional Airport, was closed the day of the attacks at the request of airport officials.

Gilmour said 9/11 will live forever in the memory of all who experienced it. She focused her remembrance of the day around those who accepted the call to serve.

“Ordinary people became heroes that day,” Gilmour declared. “They did things they never thought possible; they made a difference. I never again will look at a first responder, a firefighter or a police officer the same way…. Thank goodness it became ‘cool’ again to defend this country, to defend the things we took for granted.”
Achieving the Vision

At the start of the 21st century, Penn College achieved its vision to be the state’s premier technical college. In 2000, the Carnegie Classification placed Penn College in its Baccalaureate and Associate College category, recognizing a significant baccalaureate program combined with a majority of associate degrees. The college’s ongoing strength in two-year programming was confirmed when Community College Week named it one of the nation’s 100 top Associate’s Degree Producers.

The college also proved to be a leader in higher education technology. Yahoo! Internet Life ranked Penn College among America’s “most wired colleges.” The ranking acknowledged that the college’s 1:6 student-to-computer-ratio was three times better than the national average.

When the state established a new Workforce & Economic Development Network (WEDnetPA) in 2000, Penn College was chosen to act as the coordinating organization for this effort to provide guaranteed free training to eligible Pennsylvania companies.

Earning high marks for quality and expanding outreach to support statewide economic development was an expensive endeavor. In October 2000, the Chronicle of Higher Education reported that Penn College was among the most expensive public four-year colleges in the nation.

Gilmour responded by saying, “While the company we keep on the Chronicle’s lists of most expensive colleges may represent some of the nation’s most elite, prestigious colleges and universities … high tuition is not a point of pride at Penn College.”

She explained, “Our history has positioned us differently than many others in higher education. Our success always has been tied to our ability to keep pace with emerging technologies and changing workforce demands. We hope to continue on this path through the 21st century, but it won’t be easy…. Shiny new equipment becomes obsolete as technologies advance at breakneck speed. Competition for the best and brightest is intense, and a professor’s salary often cannot compete with corporate signing bonuses and other perks. The cost of educating tomorrow’s workforce adds up quickly.”
Quality, distinction and cost issues garnered national recognition for the college. *USA Today* featured Penn College in articles related to a partnership with Susquehanna Health System to help nursing students pay tuition and ensure employment upon graduation and the success of a distance-learning program that was helping working adults complete their B.S. degrees online.

The first distance-learning students to earn baccalaureate degrees from Penn College were dental hygiene students who participated in a Penn College program offered via distance at Harcum College in Bryn Mawr.

The man responsible for developing the first distance learning offerings at Penn College was Fred T. Gilmour, director of instructional technology/distance learning. He said, “This is the first of what we think will become a continuing trend at Penn College – the ability for more professionals to complete a degree in a format that is convenient and flexible to accommodate a busy personal and professional schedule.”

**Education and Emerging Technologies**

Across the state, community leaders looked for ways to educate citizens in emerging technologies in order to maintain a viable workforce and provide family-sustaining wages. Many called for new public colleges; others suggested that technical offerings be introduced on the more traditional campuses.

In July 2001, Gilmour presented testimony that addressed the challenge of providing effective technology-based curriculum without specialized, costly facilities and equipment before the Keystone Commission on Education for Employment.

“We know how difficult it is to secure the dollars needed to build effective, advanced technology laboratories, because we have done it,” she testified. “We know that a significant investment is required year after year to maintain industry-standard equipment … because we face that challenge every day. There is no inexpensive way to offer the kind of comprehensive, technology-based education that is necessary in the 21st century.”

She continued, “Without a major infusion of public monies for technology education, the costs must be passed on to students. Many Pennsylvanians who could benefit the most from the opportunities provided by our educational programs are not willing to take on the financial burden of pursuing higher education. This is unfortunate … because the futures of these men and women … and the economic vitality of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania are at risk.”

She cited experiences in which employers in fields ranging from plastics and tool-making to diesel technology and power generation “scour our campus to recruit students into high-paying jobs with excellent benefits and advancement opportunities” only to find there are not enough students choosing the fields and graduating with credentials to meet employers’ needs.

Gilmour championed Penn College programs to reach out to younger students to develop greater awareness of these career opportunities. These included Science and Math Applications in Real-World Technologies (SMART) Girls – to encourage females in grades 6-11 to consider math and science as a foundation for future careers – and degrees that work, a public television series designed to promote career awareness in emerging technologies.

“We must convince them that math and science really matter, by showing them how these subjects are applied every day in the world of work,” she said. “We must expose them to information about technical careers and help them to make informed choices.”

**Lifelong Education**

The president also emphasized the need for lifelong education for personal and professional enrichment. Under her leadership, the former Technology Transfer Center evolved into an expanded Workforce Development & Continuing Education unit, which significantly impacted workplace-training efforts around Pennsylvania.

In 2003, Gov. Edward G. Rendell said, “As I have gone around the state, I have heard universally in the workforce-development field a great need for us to ‘uptick’ our technology training and one of the institutions that everyone gives high marks to is Penn College. I wish I had 10 Penn Colleges stretched out across the length and breadth of this commonwealth.”

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The statewide impact of Penn College’s workplace outreach gained real attention in 2008 when it partnered with Penn State Cooperative Extension to create the Marcellus Shale Training & Education Center. The center was established in response to a re-emergence of the natural gas industry, supported by new horizontal drilling and hydraulic fracturing techniques used to recover the energy. The MSETC released the state’s first workforce needs assessment for the gas industry in June 2008. The college also began developing credit and noncredit programming to support industry needs.

“Penn College’s existing programs will provide the foundation of faculty, student and equipment resources to serve the industry,” said Gilmour. “We are committed to working with the natural gas industry to develop programs designed to specifically support this exciting new industry in our region, and we anticipate becoming a vital regional resource in providing a well-trained and knowledgeable workforce.”

Services for the natural gas industry and other workforce-related initiatives were headquartered in the Center for Business & Workforce Development, which opened on campus in 2007.

**FORWARD THINKING**

Throughout its history, the college focused on monitoring trends and responding to opportunities. As president, Gilmour continued to inspire this type of forward thinking: “Healthy organizations have a sound fiscal position, annual and long-range plans, and the ability to respond … when opportunity knocks,” she declared.

The college was ready when an unexpected knock arrived in 2001. The owners of the former HON Industries Inc. presented Penn College with a generous offer: a $750,000 price tag for a facility situated on 6.5 acres, valued at more than $3.4 million. In a short period of time, faculty and staff were planning to use the facility to its greatest potential.

“Let us be really creative about it,” Gilmour suggested. “There’s a facility with high ceilings and all the kinds of space we need for our academic programs. It was fabulous.”

A $7.3 million renovation converted the 104,000-square-foot building into instructional spaces for collision repair, computer-aided drafting, civil engineering technology, and automated manufacturing.

“College Avenue Labs was one of those opportunities; we were in the right place at the right time,” Gilmour said. “Without HON’s generous gift to us, the building may have become an empty, abandoned city property. But the foresight of a business that wanted to leave something behind in Williamsport allows us to educate a new generation of industrial workers here.”

The facility was dedicated in August 2003. In the same month, the college opened Rose Street Apartments, increasing on-campus student resident capacity to 1,400. Months earlier, the college dedicated the Student and Administrative Services Center and announced plans to build a new library.

Senior Vice President William J. Martin said the SASC was situated on “the front porch” of the college (just inside the main entrance). Gilmour said it represented the “quintessential one-stop idea – a place where prospective students and their families can come and have all their needs met.”

As the campus expanded to the east (in the new entrance) and to the west (with College Avenue Labs and Rose Street Apartments), the institution’s historic Klump Academic Center – located at the heart of the campus – needed a massive renovation. A two-year, $9 million project updated the oldest – and most heavily used – building on campus.

Renovation kept the period charm of the center, built in 1913, while improving access and function as a modern, efficient instructional facility. Gilmour said it ensured that general education classes were conducted in an environment that matched the quality of the applied technology laboratories on campus.

Some questioned the decision to renovate the facility rather than build something new; but the president convinced the board that the building was significant, not only to the college but also to the community.

“If you can bring pride back to the community by refurbishing an old building and making it look really new and good, then I think you’ve accomplished a lot,” Chairman Dunham said.
In 2004, the college rededicated the Academic Center and broke ground for a new library that would honor longtime supporters Roger and Peggy Madigan.

Madigan Library was funded in part by $7 million in state capital budget redevelopment funding. When it opened in 2006, the 1,000-seat facility replaced a 288-seat library built inside the Learning Resources Center in 1980. It provided room for expanded text and electronic collections, computer labs, study areas, a café, and art gallery. In 2007, the college dedicated the James Everett Logue Popular Reading Atrium inside the library, honoring a Master Teacher who died in 2004 following a 39-year teaching career at the institution.

Library Honors Public Servants

Sen. Roger A. Madigan, who represented Pennsylvania’s 23rd district, was a respected lawmaker. He and his wife Peggy, who passed away unexpectedly in 2002, developed a strong network of supporters and friends during their many years of public service.

A member of the Penn College Board of Directors and Trustee Emeritus of Penn State, Sen. Madigan was an active supporter of higher education. He and Peggy established the Pennsylvania’s Tomorrow Starts Today Student Government Seminar, providing high school students the opportunity to interact with government leaders at Penn College each year.

Madigan served in the Pennsylvania House of Representatives from 1977-84 and was elected to the Senate in 1985. He chaired the Transportation Committee; served as vice chair of the Game and Fisheries Committee; and was a member of the Agriculture and Rural Affairs, Appropriations, and Labor and Industry committees in the Senate.

“Roger Madigan is a man whose word is his bond, who is loyal to his constituents, who is known for his helpful and friendly relationships,” said Penn College President Davie Jane Gilmour. “I also see him as a beacon, a bright star by which we can set our course for the future. He has guided me throughout my presidency, just as he guided the birth of our institution, when 20 years ago, he saw the potential for an affiliation between Penn State and the Williamsport Area Community College. Penn College exists today because of the foresight of leaders like Roger Madigan.”
**Unique Ribbon-Cuttings**

Gilmour held a fond memory of the midwinter groundbreaking for Madigan Library. Guests gathered on the third floor of the Student and Administrative Services Center and looked through a wall of windows onto snow-covered ground where a spotlight accented a lone desk in the middle of an empty field where the new library would stand. Firework erupted throughout the skies to ceremoniously signal the start of the library construction.

“We don’t do ribbon-cuttings,” she said. “We do things a little differently.”

Unique ceremonies continued in 2010, when the college completed a $45 million Stage X renovation and construction project. Gilmour and Dunham drove a new car through a ribbon at the rededication of the renovated Parkes Automotive Technology Center and they made sparks fly when they used welding torches to cut through a metal ribbon at a ceremony rededicating the refurbished Avco-Lycoming Metal Trades Center.

The Stage X project also included renovating the Hager Lifelong Education Center to provide updated science laboratories and a new Robert and Maureen Dunham Children’s Learning Center, as well as constructing a residence hall for new students. The president said Dauphin Hall “allowed us to unite first-year students who live on campus in one common community where we can offer programming and services to help them succeed in their first year and remain in school through graduation.”

Senior Vice President Martin said the project was “the college’s most ambitious undertaking in terms of complexity, cost and scope” and that it “should position the college in terms of major physical-plant needs well into the 21st century.”

National rankings also indicated faculty and staff were well-positioned for meeting student needs. In 2009, Penn College gained Honor Roll recognition as one of the nation’s top 10 medium-sized institutions in the *Chronicle of Higher Education’s Great Colleges To Work For* rankings. It was the nation’s second-largest workplace recognition program, after *Fortune’s 100 Best Companies*. Penn College ranked among the top 10 in 23 of 26 ranking categories.

“People make the difference at Penn College,” the president declared. “We have always believed that our employees are very special individuals … dedicated to opening doors for our students and to creating an environment in which everyone can contribute and succeed. This survey provides confirmation that we are creating something special here. There is an energy and enthusiasm on our campus that is unique and rewarding for all of us who are fortunate to be a part of it.”

**Rankings and Reputation**

When Penn College gained a top-tier ranking among the best baccalaureate colleges in the north region in *America’s Best Colleges* later that year, Gilmour said, “Rankings provide a way to compare Penn College with other institutions, but the best measure of our success is the success of our graduates. We stake our reputation on the incredible impact of our alumni in the workforce and in the community.”

With an estimated annual statewide economic impact of nearly a half a billion dollars, Penn College has a significant impact on its community. Yet, Gilmour was even more impressed with the amount of money – an estimated $20 million – and time that Penn College employees and students give to the community in the form of donations and volunteer services.

“People build communities. You and I do it,” she said.
The artist behind many enduring Penn College symbols – from the official seal to the mace that leads the procession for each graduating class – is Fred Gilmour, husband of President Davie Jane Gilmour.

A member of the first graduating class of Williamsport Area Community College, Gilmour began developing a visible legacy on the campus nearly half a century ago.

“While in the Illustration program, I was asked to design the college seal, the mace, the first catalog cover and the masthead for the first student newspaper. I did all of them happily, never realizing how profound an honor it was to be involved in their creation,” he said.

After continuing his education and beginning his career at the Williamsport Area School District, Gilmour returned to the college in 1983 when he accepted a position as executive director of the WACC Foundation. After raising funds for important projects ranging from student scholarships to construction of the Thompson Professional Development Center, he changed gears again, taking on a leadership role in developing programs to help faculty use instructional technology to enhance student learning and introducing distance learning programs to the campus.

After his retirement, Gilmour continued to support Art on Campus initiatives. His metal sculptures decorate the campus and his work, in a variety of media, has been exhibited in The Gallery at Penn College.

“Watching the college grow and evolve from a relatively small, simply outfitted, hands-on educational facility operating out of borrowed buildings – using rundown facilities and equipment – into what it is today makes me proud,” he declared.

“The college is a true state-of-the-art institution; yet, it has not lost its focus and mission.”
Building a Legacy

Dr. William J. Martin walked the halls of Klump Academic Center as a Williamsport High School student; after college, he became a Williamsport High School teacher and principal.

Several decades later, as senior vice president at Pennsylvania College of Technology, Martin had the opportunity to oversee the renovation of the historic building that once served as his alma mater.

Martin joined the administrative team at Williamsport Area Community College as the director of secondary vocational programs in February 1983. Over the years, he was responsible for a wide variety of operations – from admissions and recruiting to student affairs, workforce development, fundraising, and community relations initiatives.

He developed the college’s first marketing plans and was a key player on the team negotiating the details of the merger with The Pennsylvania State University. Later in his career, he returned to the classroom to teach a subject he loved: scuba diving.

Martin’s most notable contribution may have been his leadership in managing large construction and renovation projects. In addition to Klump Academic Center, he supervised projects including Madigan Library, College Avenue Labs, the Student and Administrative Services Center, the Center for Business & Workforce Development, Rose Street Apartments, and the $45 million Stage X project, which added Dauphin Hall and renovated three campus structures.

One of Martin’s first construction and renovation projects was among his most cherished – the college-owned and -operated Community Arts Center in downtown Williamsport. He continued his involvement with the Center throughout his career, serving as chairman of its board of directors.

Martin admitted he was “taken aback” when he was honored with the naming of the William J. Martin Theater within the center in November 2011. He retired from his position as senior vice president several months later.

Chairman of the Penn College board, Robert E. Dunham said the naming was appropriate. “I truly believe if it wasn’t for Bill’s efforts, we wouldn’t have the Community Arts Center we have today,” he said.

Penn College President Davie Jane Gilmour recalled that Martin championed the arts center from the beginning through his efforts to acquire and renovate the circa-1929 building and then manage operations. “He had the heart and skills to breathe life into this building,” she said.

With laudable skills and a heart that embraced his hometown of Williamsport, Martin built a legacy that will be visible on campus and in the community for generations to come.
**Community Pride**

Giving back was an important focus of Gilmour’s personal and professional life. Her community affiliations and professional activities included serving as incoming chair of the Board of Directors for Little League International, president of the Community Arts Center Board of Directors, past chair and member of the executive committee of the Williamsport-Lycoming Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors, and past chair of First Community Foundation of Pennsylvania. She also is a member of the Susquehanna Health System Board, Central Pennsylvania Workforce Development Corporation Board of Directors, Penn College Foundation Board of Directors, and has served as a trustee of the YWCA of Williamsport.

“When asked to serve on boards and committees or to work with organizations in our community, I tell them: What you see is what you get,” Gilmour said. “I will always tell them the truth. I work hard to do so respectfully and openly, but I am always honest. I never compromise my personal values or take any position that would reflect negatively upon the college.”

Her community pride reached its peak in 2008 when Williamsport and the Community Arts Center were selected to host the Governor’s Awards for the Arts. It was the first time a city in north-central Pennsylvania earned the honor of hosting the ceremony. Gilmour welcomed the governor, first lady, and honored guests to the arts center.

“In a technology-driven 21st century, the creative arts continue to play a key role in our society,” she said. “As individuals and as communities, we dream new ideas and grow in new directions because we feel inspired by our surroundings and by the creative expressions of our fellow human beings.”

While Penn College and the local community experienced increased recognition and growth, global economic hardships impacted day-to-day operations. The president called for “consolidation and conservation” across campus as efforts were made to adjust operating expenses in response to reductions in state appropriations while maintaining quality programs and services.

“While we must address current economic realities, we also must stay committed to positioning the institution for the future,” she said. “We strongly believe that Penn College represents an important asset to the commonwealth – especially as we try to rebuild our economy – and we will do everything in our power to maintain our quality of education and service to students.”
Reassuring Recognition

In 2012, Gov. Tom Corbett recognized those efforts by recommending level funding for the college while cutting most higher education allocations. He also named Gilmour to a new advisory commission on post-secondary education. She said it was “reassuring” for Penn College to be recognized in this way.

“The governor cited our success as a model for others,” Gilmour stated. “I think people see what we’re doing, responding to workforce needs. I think people see that our 95-percent placement rate is something to aspire to, so our outcomes are appropriate.”

Gilmour was realistic about challenges facing the local and worldwide economy, but retained a strong sense of optimism about the future.

“It will take a great deal of personal commitment and patriotism to restore our confidence, our communities, and our country. The good news is: History is filled with stories of Americans facing challenges and finding new paths to success. Giving up is not the American way.”

She expressed that same confidence when discussing the legacy of leadership at Penn College.

“We’ll have different challenges and different opportunities, but this place will go on forever,” Gilmour assured. “There will be new leaders and there will be new marks of distinction and there will be new, significant accomplishments we haven’t even thought of yet.”

History Connects

Gilmour said she felt honored to lead the institution into its Countdown to the Centennial – a celebration of its 100th anniversary in 2014. When announcing the countdown to a group of WTI alumni, she spoke of how history connects them with present-day students.

“Dr. (George H.) Parkes (WTI founding director) had a thing about junk … sending faculty and students to nearby junkyards to look for furniture and materials that could be used in our classrooms and offices. Today, we don’t scour the junkyards to find materials and equipment, but we do look for every opportunity to improve the lives our students and our community. And we look
to people like you – those deeply connected to our past and committed to our future – to help us succeed…. You are a generation that taught us to aim for greatness, to reach beyond the limitations of the past in order to make a difference in the future.”

Gilmour said while she did not know Dr. Parkes, she was well-acquainted with all of the institution’s other leaders that came before her.

“I was fortunate enough to know Dr. Carl. That was wonderful. He was – and would continue today to be – proud (of the institution). Dr. Feddersen was a great guy who was president when I was hired here. Dr. Breuder taught me a lot. I worked with him for a long time. It feels special to have known all but one of the presidents,” she declared.

The board chairman for most of Gilmour’s presidency said he believed she was a different kind of leader.

“I walked across the campus with her a lot,” Dunham said. “Everybody knows who she is and they don’t put her on a pedestal. She doesn’t put herself on a pedestal. She is the leader, but she is the servant of this college.”

Gilmour admitted to a preference for the informal in her campus relationships.

“I really just prefer most of the time to just be ‘Davie.’ My dear friend Bill Martin will often say to me, ‘You’ve got to come to grips with the fact that you’re the president.’ I’ll say, ‘Why can’t they just talk to me?’ And he’ll say, ‘Because you’re the president.’”

She credited Martin with inspiring her to be a better leader.

“He taught me how to be a very good daily manager. He told me once to read the One Minute Manager book and then, after I finished reading it, I read it again. Nobody could move work like he could and he really taught me how to focus and get my work done, my task done. He was a big inspiration on me.”

Inspiration is a key quality of a good leader, she said. “Number one, a leader has to be somebody who’s inspiring and … who gets things done … removing obstacles.”

As the leader of one of the state’s most respected institutions of higher learning, Gilmour continued to express an eagerness to roll up her sleeves and get the job done – values she learned as a young girl.

“My father taught me to value all people, get your hands dirty and pitch in – you’ll be a better person for it,” she said.

“What makes us unique as individuals is our ability to overcome obstacles, to apply our knowledge and our skills for a purpose, and to contribute in meaningful ways to our families and our communities,” she concluded. “I am proud that Penn College has, as its core mission, a commitment to helping men and women reach their fullest potential. It is what makes me feel good about doing my job every day.”
Student Government Association Presidents

Student Leader Legacy Scholarship
The Student Government Association created the college’s first student-established and student-run endowment program in 2006-07. The Student Leader Legacy Scholarship is presented annually to recognize students who are committed to continuing the legacy of leadership at Penn College. More information on the Student Leader Legacy Scholarship is available from the Institutional Advancement Office or SGA.

1965-66    James Rys
1966-67    no name on file in archives
1967-68    Dennis Shattuck
1968-69    Rick Williams
1969-70    John Gates
1970-71    Jerry Shoemaker
1971-72    Keith Walborn
1972-73    Ted Saul
1973-74    Glenn Barnes
1974-75    Jerry Beck
1975-76    Mike Perry
1976-77    no name on file in archives
1977-78    Dana Catalona
1978-79    Mary Jacobson
1979-80    Robert E. Thomas
1980-81    Douglas S. Ressiquie
1981-82    Curtis E. Zemencik
1982-83    Leroy D. Carper
1983-84    Ruth A. Fischer
1984-85    Steven D. Metzker
1985-86    Gregory S. Lange
1986-87    William J. Fritz
1987-88    Brian Winters
1988-89    Terry Henninger
1989-90    Paul Dembowski
1990-91    Todd Mason
1991-92    Dave Watters
1992-93    Laura Dam
1993-94    Timothy L. Young
1994-95    no name on file in archives
1995-96    no name on file in archives
1996-97    Richard J. Elder
1997-98    Chad Rudloff
1998-99    Ken Harding
1999-00    Joseph Rybnick
2000-01    Matt Harper
2001-02    Jesse Viani
2002-03    Jesse Viani
2003-04    Dee Hostetter
2004-05    James Riedel
2005-06    Sabrena A. O’Keefe
2006-07    James Riedel
2007-08    Andrew S. Wisner
2008-09    Brian D. Walton
2009-10    Scott M. Elicker
2010-11    Adam J. Yoder
2011-12    Gregory J. Miller
2012-13    Ryan M. Enders
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<td>Eva Marshal</td>
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<td>H. Carl Simon</td>
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<td>Fred C. Wagner</td>
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<td>Dr. Kenneth E. Carl</td>
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<td>1973</td>
<td>Mr. George E. Logue Sr.</td>
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<td>Lou Hunsinger</td>
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<td>Richard L. Mickel</td>
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<td>Judge Robert M. Kemp</td>
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<td>Sidney L. McQuay</td>
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<td>Darryl W. Kehrer</td>
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<td>Jack Minnier</td>
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<td>Michael Rafferty</td>
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<td>Mel Tra</td>
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<td>2009</td>
<td>Robert O. Rolley</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>Dr. Angela Lutz</td>
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CONCLUSION
It was a privilege to compile this collection of stories that portray the leaders of Williamsport Technical Institute, Williamsport Area Community College and Pennsylvania College of Technology – from the institution’s founding as a small vocational program in Williamsport High School to the present day.

The opportunity to author this book was, in fact, the greatest privilege of my 35-year history with the institution. It was followed closely by the honor of receiving the college’s Distinguished Alumni Award.

I was attracted to Williamsport Area Community College as a high school student in the 1970s. As news editor of my high school newspaper, I was invited to visit the WACC campus and learn more about its journalism program. When I entered the office of the Spotlight student newspaper, I was hooked. The energy and enthusiasm I found there among the student journalists convinced me that I was home.

The campus was my home for the decades that followed. I left only briefly after graduation to work as a newspaper reporter with the Williamsport Sun-Gazette – a job I’d landed and maintained during my last year at WACC. I worked for the newspaper until December 1980, when I was invited by Dr. David M. Heiney to consider a position in the college’s communications office. I met Dr. Heiney when he was dean of students; at the time I was hired, he was interim president.

I was blessed with the opportunity to work with three of the institution’s leaders – Dr. Heiney, Dr. Robert L. Breuder and Dr. Davie Jane Gilmour. I met two others along the way: Dr. William H. Feddersen when I was a student and Dr. Kenneth E. Carl when he became active in the college’s Diamond 10 Anniversary.

While doing research for that celebration, I found in the college archives audiotaped interviews with Dr. George H. Parkes. The incredible stories shared by WTI’s founding director sparked my desire to know more about the institution’s evolution. I became a collector of stories, years before the college launched its Countdown to the Centennial.

I also was inspired by an oral history project developed by one of my favorite WACC professors and an experienced historian, Dr. Daniel J. Doyle. By preserving the institution’s history through videotaped interviews with some of its most influential leaders, Dr. Doyle presented the college with a priceless gift. His commitment to continuing the project well into his retirement years is a testimony to his enduring connection to the college’s past, present, and future.
As a WACC student – even while developing a social conscience and appreciation for history in Dr. Doyle’s classroom – I had no idea that I would spend most of my adult life serving as one among many ambassadors promoting the college throughout the community. This Legacy of Leaders collection celebrates all I have come to appreciate about the men and women who led the way for our success as an institution.

Over the course of the last century, the leaders of WTI, WACC, and Penn College elevated this unique institution of higher learning from its roots as a local adult-education program to a position of national acclaim. Their stories remind us that each generation faces its own challenges and celebrates its own accomplishments.

Different times call for different people – different styles of leadership. Fortunately, over its 100-year history, the institution always seemed to have the type of leader required to meet the challenges of each era. Each leader paved a new path and encouraged new ways of thinking about the future.

Leaders have the responsibility for building a foundation for success without knowing what the future might hold. They can only imagine where their plans and their choices might lead. Still, the great ones find the courage and conviction to move us forward.

Ralph Waldo Emerson said, “Our chief want is someone who will inspire us to be what we know we could be.”

On behalf of the thousands of students, alumni, employees, retirees, and community members who have been awe-inspired by the leadership of Dr. Parkes, Dr. Carl, Dr. Jones, Dr. Feddersen, Dr. Heiney, Dr. Breuder, and Dr. Gilmour … I offer a humble and heartfelt thanks for encouraging us to achieve our potential and become even more than we once believed we could be.

Elaine J. Lambert
Director, College Information & Community Relations
Pennsylvania College of Technology

Distinguished Alumna 2007
Williamsport Area Community College, Class of 1979

Please visit www.pct.edu/centennial to view portions of interviews conducted as part of the oral history project initiated by Dr. Daniel J. Doyle.
IN APPRECIATION

The special assistance of these individuals made it possible to achieve publication of Legacy of Leaders.

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Patricia Scott
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Sarah Patterson
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Tom Wilson
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Net proceeds from the sale of Legacy of Leaders will become permanently restricted funds that will be invested to create income used for annual scholarship awards from the Penn College Endowed Alumni Scholarship.

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