

Milliken honored for 48 years of service on college Board of Trustees

Editor's Note: On May 12, Wofford trustees, former trustees and benefactors came together on the campus to honor retiring trustee Dr. Bob Stillwell and Roger Milliken, completing his fourth 12-year term of service on the board. Milliken has been given the unique title of Wofford Trustee Emeritus, and the college arboretum will henceforth bear his name. As the college prepared for this special occasion, John Watson '88 and Baker Maulsby '92 of the college's office of communications and marketing were presented with a daunting assignment — to create a video tribute that would shed new light on the special relationship that has existed between Milliken and Wofford College for half a century. Following are some reflections by Baker Maulsby on a job well done.

Ten minutes doesn't give a lot of time to capture the story of a man who has served on Wofford's board for 50 years, donated tremendous sums to the college, and stood at the forefront of many changes at our institution, including most every physical improvement the campus has seen over the past few decades.

But when David Beacham '77, vice president for administration, came to our videography team with just such an assignment, I said, "Sure, we can do that."

Actually, David and President Benjamin Dunlap really didn't

envision Roger Milliken's life story on film. Dunlap explained that he wanted "a kaleidoscope of perspectives" from people who have worked with Milliken at Wofford.

So our videographer, John Watson, and I set out to collect interviews with Wofford people who know Roger Milliken best: current and former administrators, professors and colleagues from the Board of Trustees. Milliken also is known for bringing in big-leaguers from the realms of architecture, landscape and horticulture, and we wanted their perspective, too.

We finished with some really powerful comments, I think, from a variety of Wofford characters. If you'd like to watch the video, it's available on the "Sights and Sounds" page of the college's Web site. I'll take this space to share a few of the insights we couldn't work into the video.

Dr. Joe Lesesne, who served for 28 years as Wofford's president, was our first interview subject. His thoughtfulness, sense of humor, and knowledge make any Wofford-related conversation with Lesesne fascinating. Three highlights from our interview:

- He told us about his first meeting with Milliken after becoming president of the college. Lesesne was

Roger Milliken with Hal and Minor Shaw. Milliken and Minor Shaw served on the Wofford Board of Trustees for 12 years.



Roger Milliken with Wofford's three most recent presidents: (left to right) Dr. & Mrs. Paul Hardin, Milliken, Dr. & Mrs. Joab M. Lesesne Jr., and Dr. & Mrs. Benjamin B. Dunlap.

only 34 at the time. Milliken was an established captain of industry on an international scale. Milliken's purpose in the meeting was to personally assure the young president of his support.

- Lesesne noted that Milliken was skeptical about co-education when discussions began that eventually led to admission of women students. But once it was clear that the board majority was solid in its direction, Milliken was a team player, Lesesne told us. "Roger Milliken could have taken his time, energy and resources elsewhere, but his focus was, 'OK, how do we make sure we do it right?'"

- Roger Milliken has made possible dozens of improvements to the Wofford campus, but sometimes projects were met with initial resistance. When plans were being made to reroute the main campus drive and develop a professional landscaping concept, there was great concern among Wofford faculty members and alumni that we not lose the historic charm of the campus.

All this caused a good deal of stress for the administration. Looking back on the episode, Lesesne laughed and said, "I can't say that it was like giving birth to a baby — I don't know what that's like — but maybe it was like passing a kidney stone." I was sorry we didn't get to use that one — audience members would have laughed out loud.

A phone conversation with Paul Hardin, who left Wofford in 1972 to become the president at Southern Methodist University and later at Drew University and at UNC-Chapel Hill, revealed that after all these years, Hardin remembers working with Roger Milliken vividly. He says Milliken is unique in his principled support for a "marketplace of ideas."

We loaded John's camera and tripod into a sedan for a trip to the Myrtle Beach law office of Tommy Brittain '75. We had a really great interview. Brittain was listed recently as one of South Carolina's "Super Lawyers" (April 2008, New York Times) and it's not difficult to comprehend why he's been so successful in the courtroom. His comments are direct and incisive, and he expresses himself with flair.

In addition to several remarks about Roger Milliken that we included in the video, Brittain talked about the job of leading the Wofford Board of Trustees — the joy of working with talented people who are passionate about the college, as well as the challenges of managing personalities, ambitions and competing ideas. It was a fascinating glimpse inside the workings of Wofford's board.

Brittain noted that one of his proudest moments as board chairman surrounds the renovation of Wofford's baseball facility and the dedication of Russell C. King Field. It was Milliken's respect for donor and fellow trustee Toccoa Switzer that swayed him to the side of expanding the facility at a traditional campus location. Brittain believes Milliken, who was serving as facilities chairman, would have eventually helped make it happen. But it was a matter of personal friendship and respect that enabled the completion of Russell C. King Field and Switzer Stadium sooner rather than later.

Working on a building project with Milliken means taking part in lots of meetings — pouring over every detail, analyzing all possibilities.

"We had 26 meetings" in planning for the renovation of the Campus Life Building "commons," Dean of the College David Wood recalled. But Wood was astounded (I am, too) by the

transformation of the building's once-drab lobby area and back hallway connecting sides of the Benjamin Johnson Arena. He gave credit not only to Milliken's overall guidance, but also specific design ideas he proposed.

Dunlap, too, expressed amazement at Milliken's architectural savvy and how he has applied it to the betterment of Wofford as an institution. He gave us a great quote to the effect that students tend to take their surroundings for granted, but as they approach graduation, they often admit that "your thoughts really are elevated by the place in which you have them."

Those who have been around Wofford during the past decade know about Dunlap's prowess as a public speaker. What some may not know is how brilliant he is in an interview setting. Need a pithy remark about the value of a liberal arts education? Bingo! Dunlap could surely talk for hours on the subject, but in less than a minute he'll make you a believer. His command of the English language (and many others) is obviously world-class, and I suspect that his years as a television producer and host have helped make his skills on camera razor-sharp.

Our interviews yielded other insights into the leadership of Wofford, the institution's history, and our primary theme — Milliken's ongoing relationship with the college. One day we hope to put it all together into a longer documentary.

As it is, I feel fortunate to have been part of this project. It has certainly given me a greater appreciation for the workings of the college and the impact made on this place by one of its most generous benefactors, Roger Milliken.

by Baker Maulsby '92