

Longtime Educators Retiring After Distinguished Careers

Wochholz Marks End of Era(s)

Just as he has throughout a distinguished career in education, Weston Wochholz has worn many hats for GVSU's School of Education. Now, after 31 years at Grand Valley, he is hanging up his hat at the end of the spring semester.

Wochholz, 73, has been a fixture on the Grand Valley campus since the time man first walked on the moon. Wochholz is teaching two courses in his final semester of his GVSU career, which has now made its way into parts of five decades, two different centuries and another millennium.

"The time went by like lightning," Wochholz said. "So many things seem like they happened just yesterday."

There was a time when Wochholz was one of only six members of the School of Education, which at the time was known as the Educational Studies Institute.

"We had fewer members, so among us we had to cover the whole waterfront," Wochholz recalled. "The curriculum wasn't as broad back then, though."

"I've done quite a few different jobs over the years."

Indeed. Wochholz's duties ranged from administration — where he served as an assistant to the director of the School of Education, to program coordinator, to teaching Classroom Management, Secondary Student Teaching, Elementary Student Teaching, Teacher Assisting, Interaction and Analysis and Introduction to Education.

"I've pretty much run the gamut," Wochholz said with the familiar laugh that made him so popular among faculty and students alike.

Wochholz said the biggest growth at Grand Valley has occurred over the past 10 years with the addition of graduate courses, downtown campus and increased enrollment.

"In terms of faculty, we have grown from six to 40-something, so we've grown a lot over the past 30 years," Wochholz said. "The one constant has been the constant state of change."

Prior to coming to Grand Valley in 1969, Wochholz was in public school administration and teaching, serving as a high school principal, junior high principal and elementary principal.

"Over 48 years, you get a chance to do all that," Wochholz said. "I wouldn't have stayed with it if I hadn't enjoyed it so much."

Wochholz plans on traveling to Europe and visiting Munich, Germany, where he was stationed during U.S. occupation just after World War II.



Wes Wochholz and Phil O'Connell, right, have been mainstays in GVSU's School of Education.

O'Connell Leaves "Second" Career

Phil O'Connell is retiring. Again.

Like a prize fighter that retires and then unretires, the former superintendent of Kenowa Hills Public Schools did just that — some 10 years ago.

In 1991, O'Connell came out of retirement to accept a visiting faculty appointment at GVSU. He has been part of the School of Education ever since.

He originally began his affiliation at Grand Valley as an adjunct professor in 1977.

When he returned to GVSU in 1991, O'Connell had been in public schools education for 34 years, including 14 as superintendent for Kenowa Hills Public Schools. He also was an elementary principal for four years and a junior high school teacher.

"When I was a superintendent, I was eager to hire Grand Valley graduates, because I knew they came from a quality program," O'Connell said.

He taught his final two sections of Introduction to Education during the spring semester.

"I will miss the interaction with the students," O'Connell said. "That's what it's all about."

The growth of the curriculum over the past 10 years has greatly enhanced the mission of the School of Education, according to O'Connell.

"I think we've added courses to the curriculum for future teachers that will be very helpful to them when they get into the classroom," O'Connell said.

Two of those courses — Diversity in Education and Classroom Management — are especially beneficial, according to O'Connell.

"There has been a real commitment on the part of staff to have students come out of the program really ready to teach with two field experiences, and four for those going into special education," he said.

During this "retirement," O'Connell, 67, plans to travel with his wife, Patricia, and do some volunteer work with the Literacy Council.

"We've got several different places we haven't visited and we want to do some traveling," O'Connell said.

Colleagues

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