



- Learn More ...**
- 40th Anniversary
  - Campus Archive Photos
  - Timeline
  - Recollections
  - Anniversary Events 2008-09
  - Celebrating Alumni
  - Legacy Stories
- About UW-Fond du Lac**
- Academics
  - Student Life
  - Admissions & Registration
  - Community Resources
  - Library/Technology
  - Continuing Education
  - UW-FDL Home Page
- Resources For ...**
- Future Students
  - Returning Adult Students
  - Parents
  - High School Counselors
  - Alumni & Friends
  - Current Students
  - Faculty & Staff
- Quick Links ...**
- PRI SM
  - D2L
  - Library
  - Top 10 Reasons
  - Campus Map
  - Campus Visits
  - Faculty/Staff Directory
  - UW Related Links
  - Web Mail
  - Employment
  - Contact Us
  - Help Online
  - Apply Online

Home / 40th Anniversary / Recollections / Bill Henken

Print this page

## Bill Henken

### Dean Henken reflects on early days at UW-Fond du Lac campus by Monica M. Walk

Visiting campus on a blustery November afternoon triggered a strong sense of familiarity for retired Dean Willard Henken, Ph.D. "I remember that wind," the UW-Fond du Lac founding dean smiled. "Brings back memories."

In actuality, Henken needs no memory aid. At age 80, his recall of the origins of the Fond du Lac campus is clear and articulate. "I can't believe it's been 40 years," he said of the school he grew from the ground up in both bricks and programming.

Talk of a possible two-year campus in Fond du Lac had bounced around for several years before it became reality in 1968. The County Board's gift of land -- a former airport site--was pivotal, as were the efforts of the Wisconsin Coordinating Council for Higher Education and a Citizen's Committee of Fond du Lac residents.

"The energy, wit and determination of the people in this city worked to make the campus a reality," Henken stressed. "Once the decision was made, I was fortunate to become a part of it."



Dean and Mrs. Henken have remained committed to supporting the UW-Fond du Lac campus in many ways, including sponsoring an annual scholarship. Dolores Henken (left) and Dean Henken met one of the many UW-Fond du Lac students who has benefited from this scholarship over the years. Joey Kanda (center) was able to thank the Henkens personally at a recent scholarship reception at UW-Fond du Lac.

He was a newly minted Ph.D. in education administration and a rookie faculty member at his Wisconsin State University-Oshkosh alma mater (back when Wisconsin had two state systems of higher education) when he was tapped for leadership in Fond du Lac.

Those fresh credentials were backed by years of applicable experience: building a private K-12 campus as superintendent in New Delhi, India; recruiting teachers and working on-site for a northern Nigeria teacher project as a graduate student; and, prior to world travels, serving seven years as Cedarburg High School's principal -- an "outstanding job" he was voted into before he had the chance to apply.

The Fond du Lac campus began as a branch of Oshkosh, a link Henken says helped in creating the new institution's program statement and providing additional resources, including a large library.

"Oshkosh was growing rapidly, and a campus like this served a useful purpose for those not ready for a larger campus," Henken noted. "It also provided quality education at a reasonable price. This was not second best -- this was a different choice. It was just as rigorous of a program, but without the large numbers. We had to be sure people knew the quality here."

Initially, he spread the word himself by visiting local high schools; soon enough, satisfied students from Wisconsin State University-Fond du Lac Branch did the advertising. The campus opened with only freshman classes and grew class offerings with the continuing students, another strategy for ensuring quality. This quality was achieved with speed: ground breaking was Sept. 27, 1967, and classes began Sept. 9, 1968.

"We opened amid the sound of construction. The Governor attended our dedication and noted, 'You still have some things to do,'" chuckled Henken, whose building plans and positioning purposefully created a sense of campus, even on a small scale. The facilities were deemed modern in every respect. "But, it was a thrill to open the campus. I made a point of being here to see the first students walk in. Students breathe life into an institution; they are the lifeblood."



Once the campus was operational, Henken turned his attention to instruction and staffing. "It was a positive switch: I became involved with people and not things," he says. He remained focused on continued quality for 19 years, and his tenure included the education of his own three children. He credits high-school sweetheart and wife of 58 years, Dolores, for encouraging his professional endeavors. He retired at age 60 in 1987.

Former students still recognize him. "Hearing that they really enjoyed their time on campus, and that they are so glad they attended, makes my work worthwhile," Henken said. "Those of us in education talk about these 'intangibles' -- seeing students grow, mature and gain self-confidence -- reading about them, and finding out what they are doing and the successes they are having... hearing them say they are doing well and are glad they came here. These are the things that make me feel good, and make it all worthwhile."

Now retired for 20 years -- a year longer than his fruitful deanship -- Henken remains connected to campus as a scholarship sponsor and attends a variety of events. Henken is serving as honorary co-chair of the steering committee for the UW-Fond du Lac 40th anniversary celebration in 2008-09, an event made possible by his positive and professional grounding of this campus, and the memories he shares with so many.



Willard (Bill) Henken

### "Recollections" from Dean Henken

A telephone service provider saying he was glad to have the campus as a client, but they "sure did ruin some good hunting land."

Eugene McPhee, secretary of the Board of Regents of the Wisconsin State University System, referring to the campus as a jewel. Criticism about the large size of the campus led him to quip, "I told the committee to have Henken mow the grass."

The support of then-county administrator Don Flanders, "a driving force in making the campus a reality."

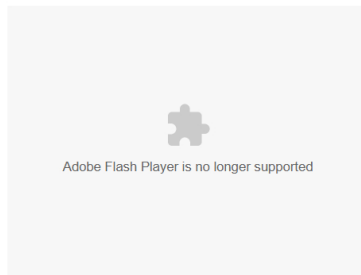
The names of the students honored as the first registered on campus: Dale Boyke and Miss Randy Simons.

Ken Thomas' contributions in creating solid student programs, and his willingness to relocate from the Oshkosh campus. "He had a knack for thinking up attractions. He equipped the student center well. He was a real asset to campus."

The arrival of Allen H. Loehndorf as director of student services and Eugene J. Beck as registrar, both early colleagues who helped shape the campus.

The Madrigal Dinners, which transformed the campus with Medieval revelry and music, and brought together students, faculty and community members.

The day Jack Heil, Ph.D. (physics, emeritus) relayed that UW-Madison was recommending engineering transfer students complete the first two years of study in Fond du Lac's rigorous program.



#### CAMPUS TIDBITS

UW-Fond du Lac officially opened on Sept. 9, 1968 as the Wisconsin State University-Fond du Lac Campus. The freshman class of 230 students in 1968 paid \$161 for their tuition and fees.

