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Judy Goldsmith

Campus Rebirth: Dean Judy Goldsmith recalls renovation of UW-Fond du Lac campus

by Monica M. Walk

Technically, it was a campus renovation. Locally, it is acknowledged as a rebirth.

"It was a dying campus," confirmed Judy Goldsmith, the dean who spearheaded the transformation at the two-thirds mark of her nine-year tenure at UW-Fond du Lac. "Nothing had been done to keep it up. Our enrollment was down, while others' (UW Colleges campuses) grew."

In January 1999, that changed drastically: nearly \$13 million was approved for major capital improvements. At 32 years of age, the campus was poised to return to its original position as an institution on the leading edge of education.

The once-fashionable browns and oranges would be lightened and brightened; the noisy heating system silenced; the crowded classrooms eased and enlarged; and the whole campus outfitted with the technology and infrastructure now necessary to prepare students as global thinkers.

Perhaps most significantly, the campus was gaining an additional structure, which would join the existing buildings while providing a new library, theater, music rooms, large group instruction room, book store, and an eating and gathering space. Rising between two existing buildings and joining together all student activity other than physical education, this new building—The University Center—would give the campus a hub, a heart, a connection of people and place.

This campus-altering renovation began with a commitment of \$900,000 from the UW System to equip and furnish a much-needed theater. Goldsmith saw the larger possibility. She approached the Fond du Lac County Board—the original funding support, and sponsor of the campus grounds and permanent facilities—with the invitation to analyze the state of the campus.

"We looked at what we had, the condition, the meeting needs," Goldsmith said. "We worked around the clock for a month to do this. We created a detailed analysis of the problems and needs for the next decade-plus. The preparation involved every single person on campus. It was a real work of art when done."

Buechel brought the analysis into the working committees of the County Board, members then visited campus to view the facility described in the report. As the time for the board to vote on funding drew near, Goldsmith worried: the nearly \$13 million figure deemed necessary for renovation loomed large.

"But, they were committed," she recalled. Public statements were made to the effect that the renovation would be expensive, but lack of care over the years had led to the current deterioration. "The vote was unanimous. It was extraordinary, magical."

It could be that Goldsmith was the right person to carry the request. With English degrees from UW-Stevens Point and SUNY-Buffalo, she began her career in academia.

Volunteer work for the [National Organization for Women \(NOW\)](#) then bloomed into leadership as national executive vice president (1978-82) and national president (1982-86), where she served as spokesperson and chief administrative officer for the organization—and earned the nickname "The Professor" from reporters in acknowledgement of the complete and grammatically correct quotes she provided. She was, perhaps, uniquely positioned to comfortably talk with legislators about education.

From funding approval to the revamped campus unveiling was a mere 21 months...and in between was a "hellacious mess," Goldsmith laughed. The campus remained open, and while the movement to accommodate classes and offices was sometimes unsettling, it generally was smooth due to the efforts of business manager Marilyn Krump.

"She was so organized...charts and grids," Goldsmith recalled, "and unfailingly nice. She also had impeccable taste in furniture and colors, and she saw that all of the intricate pieces were put together with minimal disruption."

The construction, by local and original campus contractor C.D. Smith, was a fascinating process, Goldsmith said: "We would call each other to look out the window at what was happening."

Spirits rose with the building walls. "I took faculty on a tour through the Commons, so they could see the outlines of the soaring windows," Goldsmith said, "and I could see the looks on their faces." Windows—especially the interior windows specified by Bray Associates Architects offering views of the beautiful campus from hallways and adjoining offices—remain among Goldsmith's favorite feature. "There was now a sense of openness, of transparency...and so much more sunlight."

Timing was impeccable for the unveiling of the renovated campus: October 2000, a new academic year in a new millennium.

Much of the celebration made use of the just-completed stage—dancers, musicians, actors, and singers bringing life to the musings Goldsmith had entertained while sitting on unfinished seating tiers, awaiting the theater's roof.

Giving tours to the public during the dedication week was joyful. "Many had been on campus previously, and their jaws would drop," Goldsmith reported. "It was all positive comment, mostly 'I can't believe this is the same place.' It was a period of extraordinary euphoria. People smiled all the time."

Reactions went beyond this emotional response. "Enrollment went through the roof," Goldsmith said. "People could feel proud to go to school here. The grounds had always been beautiful, but now the science labs were current, there was storage, it was functional. The campus was now the loveliest of the 13 UW Colleges. It was a 21st century educational environment."

Goldsmith, who retired in 2002 and continues to live in Fond du Lac, said she is reminded of the renovation magic each time she returns to campus. "I never walk through the doors without a thrill," she said, including her several



Judy Goldsmith

Renovation Received Unanimous County Board Support

"Mount Buechel" is how former Dean Judy Goldsmith fondly refers to the large hill centrally located on the otherwise prairie-flat UW-Fond du Lac campus.

And in his role as Fond du Lac County Executive, Allen Buechel helped move that mountain. His support of the campus renovation championed by Goldsmith included construction of a student center. The earth removed for this new building was relocated and repurposed for north-side sledding fun.

Linking the buildings via the University Center transformed UW-Fond du Lac. "The campus was like a California campus in a temperate climate," recalled Buechel, citing the discomfort of outdoor, uphill walks in bitter Wisconsin winters as students and faculty navigated the physically separate buildings. An access ramp to the classroom building was disconcertingly close to the pond. "People with disabilities had to navigate hills and stairs. It was not convenient to get around. Now, you can go from end-to-end inside. That is important in inclement weather."

The campus renovation remains the largest project ever approved by the County Board. While the project's scope was big, it also was obviously necessary, according to Buechel. "The county hadn't done very well caring for the facilities," said Buechel, who began his county leadership role in 1983 and continues to hold the office 15 years later.

"It only took a walk-through of campus to see what needed to be done." Board chairman George Stanchfield quickly became a strong proponent of the campus center, which would provide communal gathering areas and help turn the tide of waning enrollment. Bolstered by Goldsmith's thorough research and presentation, Board members were able to tell their constituents that renovation was the right action to take. The full Board unanimously approved the plan, with all 35 attending members voting in favor. A 36th member, unable to attend, later told Buechel he, too, would have cast an affirmative vote.

"If it hadn't been for Judy, it likely would have been on a smaller scale and over a longer time," said Buechel. "Judy had credibility with the board." So much so, in fact, that several years earlier the Board has passed a resolution asking Chancellor Lee Grugel to make Goldsmith's interim appointment permanent.

Buechel and Goldsmith collaborated specifically on one campus renovation gem, the Prairie Theatre. Pointing to the comfort of the venue's seating, Buechel recalled with a laugh that the individual seats were sized for width by him and for legroom by Goldsmith.

Driving through campus now directs all traffic past "Mount Buechel"—but the significance of this proximity is the fact that traffic actually goes through the UW-Fond du Lac campus. Prior to renovation, a rut-filled road encircled the land with access only at the far, eastern edge. The campus felt isolated.

"The new roadway made such a difference," Buechel asserted. "People cross campus instead of going around it. The campus now feels like part of the community and is used; enrollment is up. It is a jewel of the community."

starts teaching English and women's studies on a part time basis since retiring as Dean.

She currently helps lead the Comprehensive Countywide Diversity Initiative and also serves as an elected member of the Fond du Lac County Board, supporting the community that so remarkably supported the UW-Fond du Lac campus during her tenure.

Leading the college was supposed to be a temporary position for Goldsmith when she accepted an interim appointment in 1993 at the request of then-UW Colleges Chancellor Lee Grugel, upon completing a two-year contract as Special Consultant to the Chancellor for Gender Equity and Affirmative Action at her Steven's Point alma mater. Instead, she saw the vision of what the campus could be and stayed nine years to make it a reality for the community and thousands of students.

"It was remarkable to have seen the building going up and the work by the subcontractors," Goldsmith said. "And then, to see it filled with students! To look down in the University Center Commons and see students by the windows with the sun flooding in...reading, relaxing, sleeping on the sofas. The transformation was glorious beyond words."

One event specifically captured her feelings about the campus and its relationship to the community. The internationally acclaimed Vienna Boys Choir had performed, and people socialized in the Commons after the event. As Goldsmith was leaving for the evening, she held the foyer door for a couple behind her—and continued to hold the door for another 100 to 200 people.

"It was so lovely to stand there and see the looks on their faces," she said. "They had had a wonderful evening, and were feeling high and happy. It was a really lovely experience, and I floated to my car and came home. That was so worth all of the hard work, all of the frustration, everything that went into the work that it took to renovate, to give new birth to that campus."

CAMPUS TIDBITS

The original construction cost, including land purchase, was \$5.2 million dollars. The campus renovation completed in 2000 cost approximately \$13 million.