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The Eckley Legacy

Tim Obermiller

Illinois Wesleyan University, iwumag@iwu.edu

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Each spring, flowers and trees blooming on the Eckley Quadrangle serve as gentle reminders of the president who brought both strength and beauty to Illinois Wesleyan's campus during his 18-year tenure from 1968 to 1986.

Robert S. Eckley — the University's longest-serving president — died at his Bloomington home on April 15, 2012, at the age of 90.

In announcing Eckley's passing to the campus community, President Richard F. Wilson wrote: "Bob's contributions to Illinois Wesleyan are both broad and deep. One sees the influence and impact of Bob and his wife Nell all around us."

Among the most visible signs of Eckley's legacy is the campus beautification that occurred under his and Nell's guidance. The closing of University Street allowed for creation of the Quadrangle, and a campus made barren in the wake of Dutch elm disease was rejuvenated with the plantings of dozens of new trees. The influence of his presidency can also be seen in campus buildings such as Evelyn Chapel, one of Wesleyan's proudest architectural achievements.

Eckley's most profound legacy can be found in the lives of 11,000 men and women who earned degrees during his tenure. Among them was Kathy (Larey) Lewton '70. Now a member of the University's Board of Trustees, Lewton recalls Eckley's close and productive relationship with students during a tumultuous era on college campuses across the country.

"We adored him and Nell. Even though we went through some rocky times together when we were on campus, we respected him, and in subsequent years we realized how much he'd done to steer the ship IWU in the right direction."

Eckley continued to remain in contact with current and former students long after he retired. Says Lewton, "He was an honorary member of the Class of 1970, attending every one of our reunions as our very special guest, and at our 40th said he'd look forward to our 50th 'because by then I'll be 100 years old.'

"We will miss him. He was such a part of our lives."

To read President Richard F. Wilson's remarks on Eckley's achievements, [click here](#).

To read about Eckley's words and writings, [click here](#).

To read about Eckley's LIFE before and after his IWU presidency, [click here](#).



Eckley's portrait is on display in The Ames Library.