



Spring 2001

The Network Voice Spring

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The Network. Voice

Spring Edition • 2001 Vol. 1

Oldest Living Alum, Edelbert Rodgers, Class of '33

By Kristin Gregory, '03

When Edelbert Rodgers, PhD left East Saint Louis for Illinois Wesleyan University in Bloomington, Illinois, he remembers his father giving him 75 cents and saying, "I don't think you can make it." Hearing such words might deter some young hopefuls, but Rodgers did not embrace his father's doubtful prediction of his fate.

On Tuesday, February 20th at a reception in his honor at IWU, Rodgers, a 1933 graduate of the institution, shared with students, faculty and administrators factors that brought a young man from East Saint Louis to Illinois Wesleyan University. The reception was co-sponsored by IWU's Office of Multi-Cultural Affairs and the Black Student Union.

"The thing that brought me to IWU was disliking being poor and being a nobody," said Rodgers.

The 92-year-old Rodgers spoke candidly with his legs crossed neatly and hands folded in his lap. He answered questions from members of the Black Student Union and onlookers. He also offered anecdotes and bits of wisdom to encourage current students and remind them from whence they came.

The reception was held one day before IWU's Founder's Day Convocation where Rodgers was presented an honorary doctorate degree along with six other alumni. Rodgers was the only alum to receive a standing ovation from the crowd of professors, students, administrators and community figures at Westbrook Auditorium.

At the reception, Rodgers encouraged questions and freely offered advice.

"A lot of people have done a lot of things for you," Rodgers said to students, his tone full of warmth and affection. "You find out what they've done and do some things for America."

Rodgers has certainly done his share for America. He served in the military during World War II, and has worked as a social worker, teacher and psychologist. He has touched the lives of many, but says he is most proud of his student's saying, "I'm a top teacher."



Edelbert Rodgers '33 and members of his family tour IWU's psychology labs. *photo by Marc Featherly*

When Rodgers was a student at Illinois Wesleyan University, his race made him the brunt of many jokes and caused him to be shunned by classmates and professors. He was not allowed to live on campus nor dine with his fellow classmates, and he longed for the presence of other African-Americans on campus. He said when he saw other Blacks he wanted to hug them, "whether they were pretty or ugly, man or woman."

Rodgers stayed at Illinois Wesleyan despite the negative vibes he received and let others know when he was displeased, while showing constraint. He learned lessons on

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From the Editor...

We're back. It's been awhile since our last issue, but expect us on a regular basis. We will have four issues a year. This Spring issue signals the newsletter's rebirth.

Our next issue will hit your mailboxes in early Summer as we petition for you to come back onto campus for Homecoming.

This Homecoming we want to sprinkle the campus with all hues of color so start mak-

ing flight and lodging arrangements now to be counted as one of the largest showings of alumni of color in IWU history. The current students want to see you. Make sure you read Kristin's article on Dr. Edelbert Rodgers, '33, our oldest minority alumnus living...the students embraced him and enjoyed hearing his story—they are waiting to hear yours.

We want to make this newsletter informative and one that you look forward to. Let us know what works and/or what you would like to see different. It's your Voice that we want to hear, thus, the reason for the newsletter's name change—it's your Voice.

—Lonnie Smith, '94

On Campus...

By Travis Pearson, '94, IWU, Associate Director of Development

I am very excited about the direction the university is going and would like to take this opportunity to share some of those thoughts. Over the past ten years, IWU has been on a capital campaign and the campus reflects it. My connection with IWU began in 1990 as an incoming freshman. Back then we (IWU) were bragging about the Fort Natatorium. Now, we have the Shirk Center, Center for Natural Science, an improved Memorial Student Center, Center for Liberal Arts, Horenberger Baseball & Neis Soccer fields, Harriett Rust dormitory and the Ames Library is scheduled to open in the fall 2001. The campus is so different from when I was a student and as alum I am proud of that fact.

The current students on campus reflect IWU's legacy of attracting and retaining the best students: 46% of entering freshman are from the top 10% of their graduating class; 1260 SAT average; and 27.8 ACT average. IWU has a graduation rate of 76%. Yahoo Magazine considers us one of the "ten most wired campuses".

IWU is staying focused on its mission—"We believe that our most important educational goal is liberation from ignorance and complacency." Below is an excerpt from a grant proposal written by development officer Stacy Shimizu to receive funds to create more programs on diversity.

Illinois Wesleyan, like college campuses across the country, continues to strive to create a campus community that both reflects the diversity of the nation and the world and helps us prepare our students to be thoughtful, responsible, and egalitarian participants in community life—on campus and after graduation. We have been working in many ways on many fronts for many years to promote diversity—of race, religion, background, thought, and ability—and like other campuses, we find ourselves achieving mixed results.

This fall, close to 200 people attended a daylong "Free Your Mind" workshop on diversity organized by our Multi-Cultural Affairs (MCA) office and directed by two faculty members. In the past months, campus speakers such as the Rev. Gregory Dell and Judy Shephard, mother of Matthew Shephard, have spoken movingly to large segments of our community about the need for open engagement with and respect for difference, and their words have been extremely well received.

A thorough study of the University's Multi-Cultural Center (MCC) and its programming conducted by participants in our 2000 Summer Enrichment Program (SEP) for students of color led to the convening of a taskforce to draft a plan of action for re-envisioning and reinvigorating the programming and for plans to

— CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

campus about meeting those that did not like him. "Look them in the eye and keep on walking," he said wagging a finger. "It shows them you don't appreciate their company."

While few African-Americans survived a full academic career at IWU, Rodger persevered by living at Mrs. Rush's rooming house and being active in the community. "They loved me," he said with a smile.

Rodgers gave students titles of books they should read and planned on giving the list to the institution's president to be placed on a list of books students should read. Rodgers believed in the civil rights movement and the right of everyone being free. He said, "If we're capable of building a nation, we're capable of living with it."

relocate the Center. Our new GUIDE (Guiding Undergraduates to Initiate Diversity and Excellence) mentoring program for incoming students of color, initiated by our MCA office, has been met with overwhelming response from upperclassmen and first-year students alike. Moreover, changes to our General Education program instituted in 1996 ensure that all Illinois Wesleyan students take at least two courses addressing U.S. and world diversity issues, and the numbers of students of color (166) and International students (51) are up over last year—and are more than double what they were in the mid-1990s.

I'm very proud of the direction the university is going. With continued involvement from our Alumni base, we will be the measuring stick for universities across the nation.

Speaking of continued alumni involvement, this is the Minority Alumni Network's 10th year of existence. At Homecoming we are going to celebrate and would like your help. October 5th – 7th is Homecoming and we would like to boast of having the largest reunion of minority alumni in Illinois Wesleyan University history. We can only do this with your participation. Debbie and I are forming a committee to plan festivities. If you are interested in helping, please contact one of us—we need your help!

I've been back with the University since November 2000. The focus of my job is to increase alumni participation (donation percentage) amongst alums in the Chicago region. *The higher the percentage of alumni giving the higher IWU goes in national rankings (every alumnus benefits from this).* I have a great job, I get to stay in touch with old friends and make new ones. Since my move back from Portland, Oregon, I've had a lot of life changes. The happier one is my engagement with Nyran Rasche '96 on New Year's Eve. We are both enjoying our new lives and living in Chicago, but we can't wait for summer and our wedding.

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Dates to Remember:

August 5, 2001	Minority Alumni Network Annual Picnic
October 5-7, 2001	Homecoming 10th Anniversary of M.A.N.

Students chatted with Rodgers over punch and cookies, but many wanted more time to listen to his experiences and visit with his daughter, Denise, and his wife, Virginia before they returned to Flint, Michigan. Members of the Black Student Union's executive board accompanied Rodgers to dinner at Jumer's following the reception.

Rodger's determination was an example to students and non-students alike of how sheer will and determination allow one to press their way and become successful.

When questioned about whether or not he would graduate, Rodgers said he would go with a diploma or he would go away in a coffin. "And as you know," he quipped years later, "I did go away without making a coffin."

From the IWU M.A.N. Co-Chairs...

We greet you in the perfect peace of God. We, also, want to thank and recognize Phyllis Barker, '73 for allowing us to stand on her shoulders and hang on by her coat tails. As the founding president of the IWU Minority Alumni Network (M.A.N.), she has laid a foundation and set a standard of excellence that has allowed "The Network" to be firmly established as a permanent entity and one of the strongest voices for Illinois Wesleyan alumni. Thanks to Phyllis and Yvonne Jones, "The Network" will be around as long as there are minority alumni around. Phyllis is now quite active as our immediate past chairperson with whom Debbie, Lonnie and I work with as a quartet.

As an organization, we have a lot of work ahead of us. Since our inception we have been strongly supported by the university, however, minority students today, still face many of the same issues they did twenty-five or thirty years ago. Institutional racism, minority student recruitment, lack of minority faculty, poor representation of Brothers on the basketball team, and other issues are still on the top of our agenda. Minority students need our help and support. We need each other too—we are a community with a common past.

If you missed our True Millennium Party, you missed a grand affair with lots of good food and fellowship. In the process, we raised money for the Silas Purnell Scholarship. Expect more fun activities in the future.

Please get in touch with us if just to let us know what you are doing or how "The Network" can be of help to you as a resource. We have many leads from Network members on graduate school programs, internships, and employment opportunities.

We need to hear from you, we need your help, and we need your expertise.

Yours truly!

IWU M.A.N. Co-Chairpersons:

Debbie Burt-Frazier e-mail dburtfrazier@ventiv.com

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News and Notes...



Kedzie D. Curry, '94 and Tonya L. Walker were recently engaged on December 25, 2000. Their wedding is planned for July/August 2002 in New Orleans, Louisiana.

Travis Pearson, '94 and Nyran Rasche, '96 were engaged this past New Year's Eve. Their wedding is planned for Summer 2001.

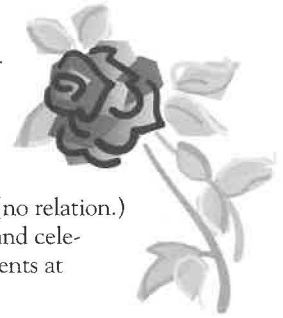
Malik '91 and Pam Jones recently returned to Chicago from the Los Angeles, California area with their two beautiful children. Welcome back!

Send an e-mail to the newsletter editor (lonnie.smith.gl3x@statefarm.com) and let us know how you are doing—we want to hear from you. I know you are probably saying that this issue looks heavy on the 70's and 90's—we want to hear from all so contact us.

Also, if you're looking for that old classmate who vowed never to return to campus, write us—we'll help you find 'em.

It's So Hard To Say Goodbye....

The Illinois Wesleyan Minority Alumni Network was founded in 1992 with a core group of Alums: Debbie Burt-Frazier '75, Dr. Ansel Johnson '81, Anthony Tolbert '77, Sylvia Edwards '75, Rosemaria Shelby-Williams '73 and Samuel Hall, III '91 with staff support from Yvonne Jones and Malik Jones '91 (no relation.) We focused on finding ways to preserve and celebrate the proud heritage of minority students at IWU.



Since the Network's inception we have established the annual summer picnic to welcome new students, engage current students and reconnect with Alumni. We have also created the annual Gospel Fest and Recognition Ceremony, which is held on campus at Homecoming to showcase the accomplishments of minority Alums. The Network has supported Mike Seeborg's Economics classes every spring with a "Chicago" experience that included a panel discussion on the impact of "Race, Gender and Ethnicity" on economic opportunities, contributed to the creation of the Silas Purnell Scholarship Fund, and developed MAN student recognition awards. Also, Network members have been involved in a myriad of on and off campus activities to support recruitment of Minority students and IWU in general. Overall, the Network has provided a conduit to establish a sense of community amongst Minority Alumni that often did not exist for us as students on campus.

I have been deeply honored to be the General Chairperson of the Minority Alumni Network since the beginning, but now it is time to say goodbye. I am so very pleased to announce that Debbie Burt-Frazier '75, and Dr. Ansel T. Johnson '81, are the new co-chairs. We can look forward to their leadership taking the Network to new heights and greater accomplishments.

From the very bottom of my heart I want to thank all of you for the support and encouragement that you have given me these past years, but more than that I want to thank you for giving me this opportunity to serve. I have never worked with a finer group of people. And you're fun too!

All my love,

Phyllis Barker '73

Central Illinois Chapter

As the Network enters our 10th year anniversary, it is time to branch out. We will begin a new chapter at Homecoming for the Central Illinois area to provide a direct link to students with alumni. This has been done on an informal basis, but we expect to take the Central State Chapter to new heights and increase involvement with the administration, faculty, staff and students. If you are in a 90 mile radius of the Bloomington/Normal area, we need your help and seek your input. Currently, we are working with students to find out what they want and need from alumni. We look forward to hearing from you and are excited about the tremendous opportunities this chapter presents for all. Can't wait to hear from you...

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Upcoming Summer issue...

- More info on the 10th Anniversary of M.A.N.
- A section, "Where are they now?" featuring a social activist alum
- More News and Notes...
- Campus updates
- Current student voices

