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Rachel Hatch

Illinois Wesleyan University, iwumag@iwu.edu

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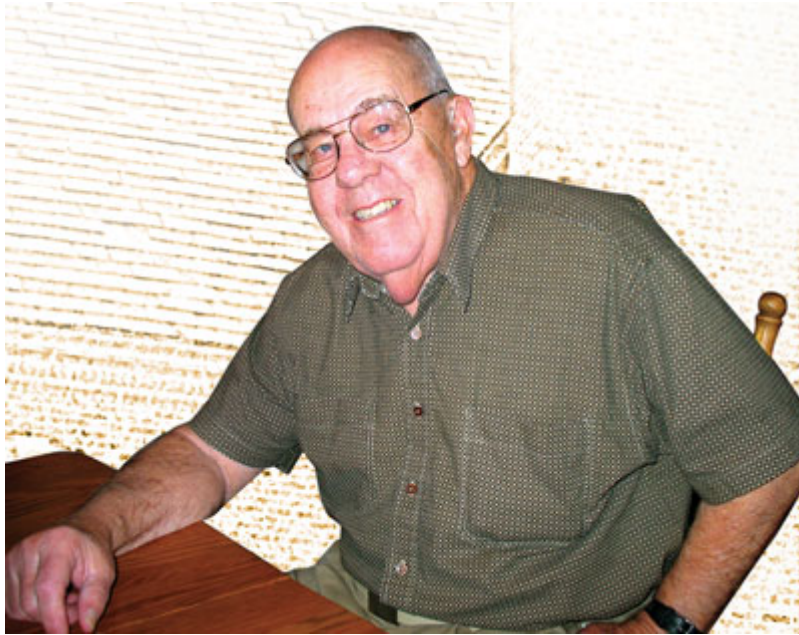
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For the Record

By finding new ways to tell the Illinois Wesleyan story, Lee Short '44 made his own mark on campus history.

Story by RACHEL HATCH



Lee Short (above) says, "Most of my life was devoted to getting the Illinois Wesleyan story told."

When Lee Short '44 served as grand marshal for Illinois Wesleyan's Homecoming Parade in 1976, the program opened with the statement: "Ever since 1941, Lee Short has been blowing his horn for Illinois Wesleyan — and he's not out of breath yet." That sentence rings as true today as it did 35 years ago.

A music major at Illinois Wesleyan, Short was known for his mastery of the French horn and other brass instruments. As a student drum major, he headed up the Marching Titan Band. But it was after graduation that he had the chance to truly lead Illinois Wesleyan, as a prolific administrator who oversaw multiple areas of the University — often simultaneously.

"It was all supposed to be temporary," says Short, who served as registrar, and for a time simultaneously held the titles of director of admissions, public relations and development. "I was a teacher, and I was supposed to just step in for a time. That time lasted 25 years."

Short arrived on campus as a student in 1940 with the hope of becoming a professional musician. "I'd played French horn since fourth grade. I couldn't imagine anything else," he says.

With the outbreak of World War II, Short was listed as 4-F, or medically unfit for duty, due to his eyesight. "There were a number of us who were 4-F. We had 14 instrumentalists from the School of Music and we decided to go into the service as a band," says Short, who performed in the Army Air Corps Band from 1943 to 1946, playing two of those years overseas.

Arriving back on campus, he earned his bachelor's degree in 1947. Like many returning veterans, Short chose an option offered by the University that allowed veterans to be listed by their original class. "So they call me the class of 1944," he explains.

Although the world of professional music beckoned, Short decided on another path.

“I had an offer with the Denver Symphony, but musicians were not well paid,” says Short. He pauses and slowly smiles. “I had met a cutie with black hair. Smith was her name. So I decided a teaching job would be better.”

Short married fellow music major Phyllis (Smith) Short '47 in 1947, and opted to take a job as a teacher and superintendent of music education in Atwood, Ill. “I was making a grand fortune of \$4,000 a year,” he says. “It sounds like so little now, but I was one of the highest-paid graduates from the music department.”

Four years later, Illinois Wesleyan offered Short a position on its faculty. He taught almost a year, also earning his master's degree from Illinois Wesleyan in music. In 1952, then-University President Merrill J. Holmes asked him to take over as the director of admissions.

Illinois Wesleyan was growing, and many people took on multiple roles in areas that are now separate departments. During his time as admissions director, Short also oversaw financial aid, public relations, the registrar's office and alumni relations. He says his greatest memories from the time include the people he hired. “There were a number of people who were my ‘cubs,’” including Jim Ruoti '63, Ed Alsene and Lynn Nicholson, who became directors of admissions, publicity and financial aid, respectively.

When asked to name his proudest achievement as a University administrator, Short answers: “The records.”

To explain his response, Short provides some background. After World War II, campuses across America experienced enrollment spikes as returning soldiers attended college on the G.I. Bill. By the early-1950s, however, that peak enrollment began to fall again. At Illinois Wesleyan, student enrollment dropped from 1,206 in 1950 to 802 in 1953.



To deal with an enrollment drop, Short invented new recruiting methods, such as distributing records.

Recruiting new students from high schools at the time “was rough,” Short recalls, noting the duties of today's guidance counselors generally fell to English teachers and principals at that time. “Many times we would visit a high school and the principal would say, ‘I don't think we have any students for you, but come take a look at our new gym.’ We could not reach the students.”

Short knew he had to find another way to reach prospective students. Through his church, he was introduced to “the son of a local woman who had started a business up near Chicago making those little, paper-thin vinyl records.” Among his clients was General Motors, who used the records to help train their employees. “I thought that was a great idea,” says Short. “So I asked if I could go in to his studio and record the Wesleyan story, telling students what they could find here.”

Short's goal was to send the record out to the state's top students. But first he had to find them. From working on his high school newspaper and for *The Argus*, Short knew the rich information that could be mined by scanning school papers.



Returning to IWU in the 1950s, Short began service in multiple administrative roles.

scan the papers for names of honors students, star athletes and other scholastic standouts. After the lab ended, papers continued arriving. Short organized a group of employees and faculty wives dubbed the Titan Council to continue searching for prospects. “It was a great resource for us,” he says.

In the spring of 1954, Short sent out records and other recruitment materials to prospective students — despite doubts expressed by some University leaders. A member of the Board of Trustees assured him that no one would play his record “because no one owned a ‘Victrola’ — that’s what we called a record player then,” he recalls. The skeptics were wrong. “We were inundated with requests for information. We went from a couple of hundred prospects in our files to around 2,500 prospects.”

IWU became one of a few schools in the state to register an increase in enrollment, says Short. Enrollment at the University jumped to 916 in the fall of 1954, increased to 1,097 in 1955 and spiked to 1,299 by 1956.

“You can call his work visionary,” says University Archivist Meg Miner, pulling the brochures fitted with the thin records out of a file folder stored at The Ames Library. “Not only was he finding ways to get the message out about Illinois Wesleyan, he was teaching people about it in innovative ways.”

Also in the archives is a set of photo books along with a cassette recording. “It was called ‘Window on Wesleyan.’ It was just to give a feel for the campus,” says Short, who also narrated the cassettes.

Short continues to leave his mark on campus through those he has inspired. Dennis Stark ’59 recently established the Lee Short ’44 Honorary Scholarship Fund as part of Transforming Lives: The Campaign for Illinois Wesleyan University. “There were several people like Lee who encouraged me, and gave me direction,” says Stark, a Harvard Business School graduate who served as a banking executive and chief financial officer at the University of Rhode Island.

Short approached the late Harvey Beutner, longtime Argus advisor and English professor, about creating a lab where students would critique high school newspapers. Short then wrote to every high school newspaper advisor in Illinois, as well as many in Missouri and Wisconsin, inviting them to send their papers for review. “Soon, we had stacks of newspapers,” he says.

After the journalism students completed their critiques, Short had staff and student volunteers



Dennis Stark '59 (above left) recently set up a scholarship in Short's honor.

Short's Wesleyan legacy also continues through his daughters who attended here: Karen Short-Mills '70, Deborah Short-Hester '74 and Barbara Brown '77.

"Most of my life was devoted to getting the Illinois Wesleyan story told," says Short. "It continues to be an institution you can be proud of. You can be proud of being a part of it whether it was back 50 years ago or whether it's now."