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Honored Alumni

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Honored Alumni

Award recognition highlights Homecoming 2010 celebrations.

During Illinois Wesleyan's Homecoming 2010 celebration, several alumni were recognized for their professional achievements and for their support of the University and its mission.

Ron Ford '78, a surgeon with the Hand & Plastic Surgery Centre in Michigan, was given the Distinguished Alumnus Award in recognition of his professional achievements. The Loyalty Award was given to Jerry Philpott '59, an active alumnus from Arizona. Rod Adams '95, the recipient of the Robert M. Montgomery Outstanding Young Alumnus Award, is the Greater Chicago market human resource leader for PricewaterhouseCoopers.

In a separate ceremony, Karen Kopan '86 received the 2010 School of Nursing Distinguished Alumni Award.

More than 1,400 alumni attended events as part of IWU's *All That Jazz*-themed Homecoming celebration Oct. 8-10. At the Alumni Awards Luncheon, Alumni Association President Marsha Guenzler-Stevens '78 spoke to a group of 500 alumni about the meaning of returning to campus.

"Every time you come back for Homecoming you're reminded that we come back, in great measure, to see the buildings but more importantly to see the people," said Guenzler-Stevens. "We have a chance not only to greet and re-greet old friends, but also this chance to really engage in honoring this alma mater's people."

Among those honored was Ron Ford, who recalled the tradition of attending Wesleyan that includes his sisters Barbara Ford '68 and Debra Ford Adkins '76.

"I first came to Wesleyan in 1964 and me and my two brothers and two sisters were stuffed in the back seat of an old Ford station wagon," he told the audience inside the Shirk Athletic Center. "We were bringing my older sister, Barb, here to Wesleyan to start her career." (Barbara herself is a past Distinguished Alumni Award recipient, having received the honor in 1998.)

Once he became an IWU student, Ford had his share of challenges. "I wanted to be a doctor from day one. I just really didn't have the skills to know how to get there," he said. "[Provost and Professor] Wendell Hess sat me down and asked me if I still wanted to be a doctor. I convinced him that I did and it was something that was really important to me. He really helped me develop the skills to get through school and to be a good student and I thank him for that."

Now a highly respected reconstructive hand surgeon, Ford said Illinois Wesleyan "gave me a chance to better myself." In a humanities class, he glimpsed his future career in a slide show of great works of art. "I was mesmerized by all these pieces of art. And I was mesmerized by how much strength they had and how much you could find in the beauty of these pieces of art. And I think that that really helped me to be a better surgeon, to be especially a better plastic surgeon, and to help me understand what is beauty and how to try to achieve it in what I do."

Currently an assistant clinical professor at the Department of Surgery at Michigan State University (MSU), Ford oversees the clinical and didactic education of plastic surgery residents throughout their five-year program. He also



Ron Ford '78 (above right) receives the Distinguished Alumnus Award from President Richard F. Wilson. (Photo by Marc Featherly)

serves as the assistant program director of the MSU plastic surgery residency program at Grand Rapids Medical Education and Research Center and is chief of the department of plastic surgery at St. Mary's Mercy Medical Center in Grand Rapids.



Jerry Philpott '59 shared fond college memories as he accepted his Loyalty Award. (Photo by Marc Featherly)

A State Farm Life Insurance retiree, Jerry Philpott “makes it a priority to support Illinois Wesleyan wherever he travels,” Guenzler-Stevens said. The Loyalty Award recipient has assisted with class reunions since his 20th and assists the Alumni Relations Office in encouraging alumni event attendance. Last year, he co-chaired one of the most successful 50th reunions ever.

Philpott recalled that when he started at IWU as a freshman, “I was a town boy. The plan was to stay at home, not live on campus.” Instead, after joining Phi Gamma Delta, he spent the remainder of the time living at the house and has since become a lifelong supporter of the fraternity.

Philpott’s long support of Titan athletics also began as a student. In his speech, he remembered coaching legend Jack Horenberger ’36, as well as Horenberger’s successor, IWU Athletic Director Dennie Bridges ’61, whom Philpott first met during his junior year and who has become one of his many fond Wesleyan friends.

One especially vivid memory was watching Bridges lead the men’s basketball team to a Division III national championship in 1997. “That was the start of a great tradition,” said Philpott, who noted that Titan teams have won four more national NCAA Division III championships since then.

Philpott said of his Loyalty Award, “I’ve received more than I’ve given. I think the Illinois Wesleyan flagship is headed in the right

direction, and it’s up to you and to me to keep it going there.”

For Outstanding Young Alumnus Rod Adams, the importance of his Illinois Wesleyan education has only grown over time. “It’s been 15 years since I graduated from here, and each year more and more I appreciate the experience that I had at Illinois Wesleyan,” he said. “You obviously get a great education here, but the friends that you made, the lessons that you learned are really what it’s all about.”

The ability to be a student and an athlete held great meaning to Adams, who was captain of the varsity track team and lettered in football. “That time that I spent playing football and track were some of the most memorable and influential years of my young life,” he said. “The pride, the dedication, the pain, the joy, trust, honesty — all those life lessons that you learn on the field — are something that have definitely made me the man that I am today.”

At PricewaterhouseCoopers, Adams has found ways to give back to his alma mater, hiring Wesleyan students for internships and full-time jobs. He is in his fifth year on the IWU Accounting Advisory Board, working with faculty to identify and recruit top accounting students and to improve the



Young Alumnus Winner Rod Adams '95.

accounting curriculum.

Adams is also a board member of Posse Chicago, an organization that recruits, identifies and awards deserving high school students four-year, full-tuition leadership merit scholarships. In addition, Adams helped create the career exploration program Xplore, which introduces non-traditional students to career mentors in the field of accounting.



Karen Kopan '86, who received the 2010 School of Nursing Distinguished Alumni Award, has worked for the past 13 years with the Critical Care Consult Team at NorthShore University HealthSystem's Evanston Hospital in Evanston, Ill. As a nurse practitioner hired into the intensive care unit in 1997, Kopan blazed the trail for future advanced practice nurses in acute care settings. She streamlined the entry process for nurse practitioner students entering the organization for a clinical rotation and received a certificate of achievement from the American Academy of Nurse Practitioners for her work creating a corporate-wide resource packet for all newly hired inpatient and outpatient nurse practitioners.

Speaking nationally and locally about the role of the nurse practitioner in critical care, Kopan was involved in the First Summit of Nurse Practitioners in Acute Care Settings. Kopan is also a guest lecturer for acute care nurse practitioner students at Rush University and an adjunct faculty member at two Chicago area schools of nursing.

Karen Kopan '86 won the 2010 School of Nursing Distinguished Alumni Award.