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Pat Wilson Builds Her Own Wesleyan Legacy

Story by **NANCY (STEELE) BROKAW '71**

Photos by **MARC FEATHERLY**

During his inaugural address, Richard F. Wilson spoke movingly about the people in his life who had inspired him — especially his wife, Pat.



Pat and Dick Wilson

“Our relationship is such,” he said, “that we cannot wait to talk to each other at the end of the day. I have come to expect that she will know when it is time to express support and concern and when she needs to stir my resolve. There are many blessings associated with the presidency at Illinois Wesleyan, but the most important one is that we get to do this together.”

Five years later, Pat Wilson continues to share in her husband’s busy life as president, appearing with him at an enormous number of events, both on campus and around the country.

“We got a package deal with those two,” Illinois Wesleyan Trustee Susan Waring says of the presidential couple. “Dick recognizes he’s the face of IWU and Pat’s very supportive.”

As the daughter of a college president, Pat Wilson was familiar with the hectic lifestyle, but admits the first year of her husband’s presidency “was a blur. I looked at my calendar and in the first four months, including weekends, we had four nights we were home alone.”

It’s easier now, she says. “We’ve gotten used to the mechanics and the scheduling. Plus, a lot of times, when we travel, we already know people and they know us. Everyone is more relaxed.”

In addition to all the travel and events, Pat Wilson works on several community boards and fundraisers. She was also one of the founding members of the Council for IWU Women, created to build a bridge of support between current female students and successful alumnae.

Wilson’s own role models for success include a mother who served as a college dean of women and professor of education. She earned her Ed.D. in educational administration in 1993, became a school principal and also coordinated the Champaign, Ill., school district’s early childhood programs. The year prior to following her husband to Wesleyan, she worked for the University

of Illinois as executive director of the Council on Teacher Education, helping to coordinate their teacher education program. This past fall, she returned to her educational roots by serving as acting chair of the the University's Educational Studies Department. "This new position," Wilson says, "has given me a chance to see the University from a different perspective. I feel part of the University in a different way."

When asked how she relaxes in her downtime, she chuckles. "My leisure skills are underdeveloped. I don't play bridge or golf. I've spent most of my life working and raising a family; however, I do love to read and travel to new and interesting locations." Since becoming grandparents, Dick and Pat have mastered the art of video chatting, though they clearly relish personal visits with children Adam and Rachel and their families, arranged as often as their demanding schedules allow.

Despite the sacrifices those scheduling demands sometimes require, Pat Wilson has no regrets. "It's really been a privilege to work at IWU," she says, reflecting on the past five years. "It's a capstone to our careers. The best way I can describe it is that it has been a gift exchange. The more we have given to IWU, the more we have received from everyone in return. No one can ask for more than that."



Pat Wilson has taken on a new role this academic year as acting chair of the Educational Studies Department.