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**In her career, with her family, and now at Illinois Wesleyan,
Pat Wilson is dedicated toward making a contribution**

By Nancy Steele Brokaw '71

In many ways, Pat Shearer Wilson's life has come full circle. She grew up in a college president's house and now comes to Illinois Wesleyan to settle into another one.

When Pat Wilson was 5 years old, her father, Dr. Richard Shearer, accepted the presidency of Alderson-Broadbudd College in Philippi, W. Va. The president's house, situated high on a hill, became home to Pat and her two younger siblings. Her mother was dean of women students and later a professor of education. Her father, in the manner of all college presidents, had to do his share of fund-raising and, therefore, traveling. Frustrated with the curvy, mountainous West Virginia roads, he earned a pilot's license and would, as she recalls, "buzz the house to let us know he was back so we could drive over and pick him up in the grassy field where he would land his plane."



"I see this as a place where I can make a contribution," Pat Wilson (above) says of Illinois Wesleyan. (Photo by Marc Featherly)

Pat was attending college at Bucknell University when she began dating Alderson-Broadbudd student Dick Wilson. "I don't think Dick had thought too much about (a career in) higher education until he met my dad," she says. "My father definitely had an influence on Dick." Shearer served as president of Alderson-Broadbudd for 32 years, retiring in 1981. The quadrangle that graces the center of campus is now named in his honor.

After graduation and marriage, Pat and Dick became high school teachers, but Pat says she always knew Dick would go on to graduate school. Pat, whose parents both received doctorates from Columbia University, was determined to further her education as well.

"Dick and I have always done what we needed to do to give each other opportunities," Pat says. A quick read through their respective resumes shows a pattern of one partner working while the other went to school. The overall picture fits together as neatly as a deck of cards being shuffled. In Michigan, Pat taught in a middle school while Dick earned his master's degree. Dick worked as admissions director of Alderson-Broadbudd while Pat earned a master's degree in school media/children's literature from West Virginia University. Pat commuted 45-minutes to work as a school media specialist while Dick earned his Ph.D.

When Dick began his career at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Pat decided to work towards an advanced administrative degree after joining the Champaign Unit 4 Schools as a media specialist and, later, curriculum coordinator. "It wasn't easy; I did it one semester at a time," Pat recalls. "I was working all day and taking classes at night." At this time, Pat and Dick were also knee-deep in raising two children. (Rachel, 27, is a kindergarten teacher in Springfield, Ill. She was married last summer. Adam, 31, will be married next year. He lives in San Francisco and works in the software industry.)

In 1993, Pat was awarded an Ed.D. in educational administration from the University of Illinois. That same year, she became the principal of Marquette School and coordinator for the Champaign school district's Early Childhood Programs, a position she held for 10 years.

It was work she found both important and rewarding, as Pat and her staff worked tirelessly to provide support to children, “all of whom were under some sort of stress due to family risk factors” and/or diagnosed development delays, she explains. Under Pat’s leadership, the program doubled in size, ultimately serving 360 children.

During her last year, a new, \$3.2-million early childhood center opened in the heart of downtown Champaign, with Pat serving as its principal. The location was the site of an abandoned bakery, a historic building that was saved and transformed into an inviting, comfortable space for social interaction, community involvement, and ‘real-world’ learning. Drawing from her literature background, Pat made certain the center contained an extensive resource library for both parents and children. She describes the center’s opening as “a capstone sort of event, very satisfying.”

During this 10-year period, Pat’s life contained what she calls “an interesting juxtaposition.” “I would work all day with disadvantaged children and low-income families, and then, on weekends, get dressed up and go with Dick to events where I would meet people who had made it in the world and were ready to give something back.” It gave her, she thinks, “a balanced perspective.”



During a campuswide reception for Pat and Dick Wilson in April, IWU Physics Chair Narendra Jaggi (shown right with his wife, Hansa) drives home a point while the Wilsons listen intently. Acting President Janet McNew (center) provided introductions. *(Photo by Marc Featherly)*

Pat says she’s excited with the possibilities before her as she begins her life at Illinois Wesleyan. Even without a 9-to-5 job, she finds herself “really busy.” This former English major has just read *Women of the Prologue: Imitation, Myth, and Magic in Don Quixote I* by IWU Associate Professor of Hispanic Studies Carolyn Nadeau and is currently reading two books by American journalist and author David Halberstam, who is the featured speaker at this fall’s President’s Convocation. Pat knows that entertaining and traveling are in her immediate future, and thinks it would be fun to sit in on a few classes.

“As you get older,” Pat says, “you realize you only have so much time to make a difference. Throughout my life, I’ve been fortunate to be able to do work that not only met our own financial goals but also served a larger purpose.”

Pat Wilson says she is looking forward to becoming a part of the Illinois Wesleyan community. “I see this as a place where I can make a contribution,” she says. And that’s what she intends to do.