



Fall 9-27-2012

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Recommended Citation

Hill, Kim, "Waverly Native to Receive Alumni Loyalty Award" (2012). *News and Events*. 4520.

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Sept. 27, 2012

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Waverly Native to Receive Alumni Loyalty Award

BLOOMINGTON, Ill. – Waverly native Coyner Smith will receive the Loyalty Award at the annual Alumni Awards Lunch Oct. 13 as part of Illinois Wesleyan University’s 2012 Homecoming festivities.

The Loyalty Award recognizes alumni who have benefited Illinois Wesleyan through service to the University, strong financial support, or both. Smith is a 1954 graduate of Illinois Wesleyan.

Smith came to Illinois Wesleyan as a music major in 1950 after graduating from Waverly High School. “Lucille Hagaman, who taught at Waverly, had a big influence on my interest in music,” Smith recalled. “I also knew some people in the School of Music at Wesleyan and I was very impressed with them.

“My father was a Methodist minister, and at that time, Wesleyan was associated with the Methodist church, so all that coming together influenced my decision to go to Illinois Wesleyan,” he added.

While at IWU, Smith joined Phi Mu Alpha, the men’s music fraternity. He said touring with the collegiate choir and the camaraderie among the choir members are among his fondest memories of his student days.

Following his time at IWU, Smith served in the U.S. Navy for 12 years as an aircraft commander of a C-130 and a flight instructor. After military service, Smith and his wife, Donna, founded Better Business Equipment in Omaha, Neb. The business received several awards for service and quality over the four decades the Smiths built the business before retiring and turning the day-to-day operations over to their son. Smith, ever the music major, developed the music and lyrics for the company’s advertising.

In 2008, the Phi Mu Alpha house at IWU was seriously damaged in a fire. Smith gave a generous gift to refurbish the house and then another one to bring it up to code so the current

members had a safe and comfortable house in which to live. The Smiths have also provided a financial gift for renovations of Presser Hall, which was built in 1929 and houses the School of Music. In addition, the Smiths have established an endowed merit scholarship as well as annually funded scholarships for IWU students.

Regarding the Loyalty Award, Smith said: “We are really honored by the award. We love Illinois Wesleyan and this award is very meaningful to us.”

Smith said although he has not lived in Waverly since high school graduation, he has remained friends with many people in the area. “For years I could walk in the Last Chance Café and someone would say, ‘Hi Coyner.’ I have always felt very close to Waverly,” he said.