



Forging the Tradition

Dr. Ken Weller '48 admits that he finds the attention more than a little embarrassing.

A member of the Hope economics and business administration faculty from 1949 to 1969 and a former football coach, he has been recognized through an endowed professorship created in his name because he made an important difference in the lives of his students.

The college's new Ken Weller Endowed Professorship honors distinguished teaching in management. The first faculty recipient will be appointed during the coming months.

Dr. Weller is pleased to see outstanding teaching supported at the college. As he considers colleagues past and present, however, he simply doesn't think he's unique.

And that, he notes, is what makes Hope exceptional.

"One of the key accomplishments in teaching is developing caring relationships between faculty members and students," Dr. Weller said. "What gives Hope College the special dimension of greatness is the relationship between people as people and not simply as purveyors and consumers of knowledge."

"My role is not unique," he said. "To be singled out is a bit awkward. I would hope that this would be seen as more than a tribute to a particular teacher but as a tribute to many across the generations."

The Weller Professorship was established through a lead gift by Jim '63 and Virginia Huizenga '64 Jurries of Holland, Mich., to honor a mentor who changed their lives.

"We want to recognize Ken Weller for how important he has been to us, and to recognize Hope College because Hope attracts people like Ken Weller and the rest of the professors and coaches who impact students' lives," Jim Jurries said.

In the fall of 1961, Jim Jurries was a new transfer to Hope, a first-semester junior who—as he himself tells it—was coasting through his classes and content with the mid-level grades that he was achieving as a result. Dr. Weller, who was teaching two of his courses, knew he was capable of more, and cared enough to say so.

"Dr. Weller said, 'You're smart enough to do four-point work at Hope College.' He



Dr. Ken Weller '48 sees his 20 years on the Hope faculty as a link in a chain that covers more than a century, extending back generations before he was a student and continuing through generations since. He sees the recognition that he is receiving through the endowed professorship that has been established

said, 'Would you do me a favor? You have the potential to earn As in my classes, and I'm going to challenge you to do it. Would you try it for me?'" Jurries remembered.

"I started studying for his courses, and soon I was getting As," he said. "I thought, 'If that's all it takes, why not do that with the rest of my courses?'"

Jim Jurries finished Hope on the Dean's List and aspiring to graduate school, but because of his earlier grades was initially turned down by his top and only choice: the University of Michigan. However, Dr. Weller, who was himself a graduate of the program, spoke to the school on his behalf, and the university reviewed his application and gave him a chance. A year later Jurries had his MBA and his first job, and was embarked upon a highly successful career in business.

Dr. Weller went on to major success beyond the Hope campus as well. After two decades teaching and coaching football at the college, he served as president of Central College in Pella, Iowa, for the next 21 years. During his

in his honor as a tribute to the many caring faculty for whom uncommon commitment to students has been and is a common virtue. Adorning the wall of his home office is a framed photograph that shows him playing in a game against Kalamazoo College in 1947 at Riverview Park.

presidency, Central experienced significant growth in its enrollment, endowment, physical plant and programs. He provided distinguished national leadership in the governance of small-college athletics and the support of independent higher education. In 1988, he was named one of the top 100 college presidents in the nation.

For Dr. Weller, who retired from Central in 1990, the key to his approach as a college president was his deeply rooted experience as a teacher.

"Whatever successes I may have had as a college president came because I saw myself

as a teacher who took on some additional responsibilities later in his career," he said. "Not as an 'administrator' who once spent a few days in the classroom."

As both a former college president and a former college professor, Dr. Weller appreciates the importance of endowed funds in support of teaching. Endowed professorships help recognize outstanding faculty members for the high quality of their contributions as teachers and scholars and provide resources in support of their work.

Hope currently has a total of 28 endowed professorships, most for specific academic departments, ranging from art to dance to chemistry to English to education and religion; some for distinguished scholars without designating a program; and one each for the library and campus ministries. The college's strategic goal is to have 36 by the 2012-13 academic year. The most recently created professorships to have faculty appointments are the Geneva Thome Begg Director of Libraries (Kelly Jacobsma, 2008), the Granger Endowed Professorship (Dr. Todd Steen, economics, 2008), and the Leonard and Marjorie Maas Endowed Professorship in Reformed Theology (Dr. Mark Husbands, 2007)

Stephanie Milanowski of the art and art history faculty is one of Hope's newest appointees to an endowed professorship. A member of the faculty since last fall, she was named to the Howard R. and Margaret E. Sluyter Endowed Professorship earlier this year.

Established in the 1980s, the Sluyter Professorship is designated for a design professional who will continue to work independently while also teaching at the college, bringing immediate career experience to the classroom. Professor Milanowski has worked in and taught graphic design for the past two decades, and has been the principal with her own firm since 1999. She appreciates the way that the Sluyter Professorship enhances her teaching.

"It ensures that every year I'll have support for my efforts in the classroom," she said.

"The endowment opens up purchasing new equipment, travel to design firms with students, and the ability for me to travel as well—to visit

other firms and bring back what I've learned to the classroom."

Professor Milanowski is pleased to have returned to higher education after some years away.

"Ever since I was young, I wanted to be a teacher," she said, noting that she enjoys equally the students who are interested in design as a career and those in other fields. "It's just wonderful when students catch on and see how design influences their discipline and their gifts," she said.

"I'm at Hope, and I'm presented with this endowed professorship that is specifically for design. It's just incredible," Professor Milanowski said.

(In an interesting bit of serendipity, shortly before News from Hope College went to press we learned that Professor Milanowski had been a particularly important mentor to Dr. Weller's granddaughter, Claire Weller '10. Small world.)

The current generation of faculty is the latest link in a chain that has stretched unbroken since the college's earliest days. Dr. Weller sees it directly in his own case. As a Hope student and young faculty member he was mentored by Professor Alvin Vanderbush '29, who had previously been mentored by the legendary Jack Schouten. Now Dr. Weller is hearing from former students who appreciated his influence in their lives, including some in teaching who influence students of their own—and they in turn for succeeding generations. He is pleased and amused that he can identify links in the chain over more than 100 years. Through the new Weller Professorship, created through the leadership of one of those former students, a new chain will be forged, with a dedicated faculty member supported in making a difference in still other lives—in ways and numbers that stagger the imagination.

"Throughout its history, Hope has been a place where students are not only educated well but are the beneficiaries of a great deal of care by the institution and the faculty," Dr. Weller said. "That's what makes Hope great."

"It's been a great pleasure in my life to be a link in that chain—the chain of paying back those who have helped me by paying forward in caring for a host of new faces. In reality it's not that big a deal. It's just a matter of doing what's natural and what's good, perhaps a reflection of religious commitment. The big deal is the unusual success and generosity of the donor," he said.

(Note: Friends and former students of Dr. Weller who are interested in contributing to the endowed professorship are encouraged to contact the Office of College Advancement at Hope by calling (616) 395-7775.)

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Virginia Huizenga '64 Jurries and Jim Jurries '63 provided a leadership gift to found the Ken Weller Endowed Professorship as a way of celebrating Dr. Weller's transformational role in their lives and in so doing to provide lasting support for new generations of faculty to make a difference to students to come.

