

Former CU president W.R. Davenport dies Feb. 10 at 95

By **JOAN MCKINNEY**
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Dr. William R. "Randy" Davenport, president of Campbellsville College from 1969 to 1988, died Wednesday, Feb. 10 at his home in Campbellsville following an extended illness. He was 95.

Dr. H. Keith Spears, interim president of Campbellsville University, said Davenport was "a stalwart that kept this institution moving during tough times. He was a solid rock that provided a foundation on which the success of CU rests today."

Davenport served Campbellsville College (now Campbellsville University) during one of "the college's most difficult times," according to the university's history book written by the late Dr. J. Chester Badgett.

The history book said: "He inherited a tremendous debt when enrollments were falling, with fewer military personnel attending under the G.I. bill, and fewer students graduating from high school."

"The trustees recognized that he had rendered invaluable service to the college, and that at his retirement the college was a thriving institution in a much-improved financial state," Badgett wrote.

Dr. Frank Cheatham was hired by Davenport as an assistant professor of mathematics in fall 1973. "I have great respect, admiration and appreciation for Dr. Randy Davenport," Cheatham, who is retired and eventually became vice president for academic affairs and who is working part time for the university, said.

"I have always appreciated the opportunities he provided me to grow as a person and professor and his support of academic freedom. Dr. Davenport served as president for Campbellsville College during some of the most tenuous days for CC.

He served during the Vietnam war growth period for CC and the decreasing enrollment period of the early '80s, Cheatham said.

"When enrollment dropped to a little above 500 in the mid-1980s, everyone except Dr. Davenport thought that Campbellsville College was on the road to closure. His faith and commitment to CC guided him and thus CC through these hard years. I would quickly add that 'hard' is an understatement.

"One of his many accomplishments is the laying of the foundation for the return of football, absent since the 1930s, to start immediately after his retirement in 1988. "Dr. Randy Davenport was always deeply concerned about the example employees set as Christian servant leaders, but just as concerned that students received a quality education. His door was always open for students and staff to discuss any concern."

Davenport retired Dec. 31, 1988 when he had concerns with his health. He felt he had done what he had hoped to achieve which was "a college with strong academic quality possessing the vital margin of an equally strong evangelical Christian orientation and commitment," he said in the history book of Campbellsville University.

He was followed by Dr. Kenneth W. Winters in 1988 who served until 1999.

Winters said, "I was so sorry to hear of Dr. Randy Davenport's death. His son Marty, who lives in Murray and attends the same church that we do, had kept me informed on Randy and Janet's condition over the past several years.

"Randy was a special person and so very supportive of me during my presidency at Campbellsville University that I will never forget his council and encouragement."

When Dr. James E.



Dr. Davenport

Jones came to Campbellsville from Alabama in 1981 as pastor of Campbellsville Baptist Church, he met Davenport. They became prayer partners immediately.

"Dr. Davenport was one of the most honest men I have ever met," Jones, who serves on the university's Board of Trustees, said. "He would come to my office every Tuesday morning, and we would get down on our knees and pray for the college," he said.

Jones said Davenport was concerned about paying the college's bills, and he would "pour out a prayer that would touch anyone's heart. He knew how to talk to the Father."

He said Davenport used his Godly ability to encourage others to help the college financially.

"He was definitely a man of deep prayer and commitment to Jesus Christ," Jones said. "He was concerned about the future of the college and believed the college had a great future. He was willing to fight for the college."

"He was a very kind man and was an encourager," Jones said. "He loved the students and wanted to know about them personally."

Davenport was a strong supporter of The Gideons, serving from 1954 until his death. He served as the group's international president. Jones said he heard many messages from Davenport about The

Gideons when he was raising money for them.

"He could touch your heart with those messages and want you to support The Gideons.

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Al Hardy, who is retired and worked at the university from 1968 until June 2011, agreed with Jones that "Davenport was one of the most committed Christians I have ever known. His unwavering love for Jesus and the Bible was a great influence on many individuals including me," Hardy said.

"He not only knew the Scripture, he lived by it," Hardy said. "His work with the Gideons was indicative of his desire for all peoples in this world to have a copy of the Bible and thereby learn to trust in Jesus."

Hardy worked in many different positions with Davenport and said, "Dr. Davenport's presidency was one of inheriting a financially struggling college. It was during this time that his impeccable character brought stability upon which those who followed have built."

Virginia Flanagan, who served under Davenport as director of public relations, alumni relations and TV, called him "a gentleman who was exemplary of Christian honor and character."

She said he led Campbellsville College through years of challenging times but with Christian values and hard work as the guiding force. "It was my honor and privilege to serve during his tenure," Flanagan said. Flanagan now serves part time as special assistant to the president for communication relations.

"Dr. Randy Davenport was a beloved Christian higher education leader who served with great honor and distinction as president during a strategic period in

the history of Campbellsville University (then Campbellsville College)," Dr. John Chowning, executive assistant to the president for government, community and constituent relations, said.

"He was known for his strong Christian faith, belief in the transforming power of Jesus Christ and commitment to Christ-centered higher education. Dr. Davenport was well known and highly respected across Kentucky and beyond for his service and leadership as president.

"We extend our heartfelt sympathy to Mrs. Davenport and all the Davenport family and are thankful for his service and commitment to Campbellsville University."

Dr. Michael V. Carter, president of Campbellsville University from 1999 until his retirement in 2020, said, "It is with great sadness that I learn of the passing of Dr. Randy Davenport.

"Dr. Davenport was a stalwart voice of Campbellsville College during a time much social unrest was present in our country. He was dedicated to keeping the academic and spiritual mission of the school first and foremost.

"In the line of CU presidents, he played a key role in the life and development of the college. He was joined by his dear wife, Janet, and their wonderful family as they served the college for 19 years.

"His contributions to the Gideons and to Campbellsville Baptist Church are too many to mention. His voice was one of clear reason, dedicated to being fair and Christ-centered in all that he undertook," Carter said.

Davenport was born in Pineville, Mo., and attended elementary and secondary schools in Missouri. He earned an A.B. degree in chemistry from the University

of Louisville; a M.S. in science education from the University of Arkansas; and his Ed.D. in administration and supervision from the University of Arkansas.

He began his academic career teaching science and serving as a principal. He was instructor in education at the University of Arkansas; associate professor of education and director of student teaching at Butler University in Indianapolis; professor of education and chairman of the Department of Education at the University of Michigan at Flint; and a consultant on television instruction with Midwest Program on Airborne Television Instruction.

He served as a reserve in the United States Navy and was active in various community and church activities. He belonged to Kappa Delta Pi and Phi Delta Kappa and was a member of Kiwanis International, past chairman of the Council of Independent Kentucky Colleges and Universities (AIKCU) and various positions with the Gideons International and locally.

"Campbellsville University and the greater Campbellsville community have lost one of her finest," Carter said.

Davenport is survived by his wife, Janet; four children, three of whom graduated from Campbellsville College, and are: Marty Davenport ('74) of Louisville, Ky.; Mary Davenport ('76), also of Louisville; Susan Davenport ('79) of Carbondale, Ill., and Liz Wilson of Louisville; seven grandchildren and three great-grandchildren, Noah and Braeden Stewart and William Stovall. Two of the grandchildren, Julie Davenport ('06) and Ben Stewart ('04) graduated from Campbellsville as well as Sue Davenport ('74), wife of Marty Davenport. The other four grandchildren are: BJ, Jon and Mike Wilson and Abbie Stovall.

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