

Retired couple stays connected to campus

by Sheryl Hanson - Thursday, July 03, 2008

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Barbara and Ken Cook both may have retired from the University of Wisconsin Oshkosh, but they can still be spotted often at University athletics and cultural events.

Barbara, who earned a master's degree in reading education from UW Oshkosh in 1982, served the College of Education and Human Services in various positions from 1982 until retiring in fall 2002 as director of the Professional Education Program. She also was involved in campus committees.

Retirement is wonderful, but she misses the daily contact with co-workers and other campus friends.

"My favorite memories at UW Oshkosh have to do with people," she said.

Ken, who was director of the Financial Aid Office from 1970 to 1998, agrees, adding that they enjoy still living in Oshkosh and all the Oshkosh area community has to offer.

"The University is a very positive force in this community," he said, "Many of the cultural and recreational opportunities available on campus are for everyone, not only for students and employees."

During his years in the Financial Aid Office, Ken had the privilege of working with many generations of students and four chancellors — Guiles, Birnbaum, Penson and Kerrigan.

"Many of my supervisors were also friends," he said.

One of the couple's favorite visits to campus centers on basketball, both men's and women's. They also remain big fans of UW Oshkosh music and theatre productions.

Until recently, the two were active in the UW Oshkosh retired faculty group, which has suspended its activities due to low participation. It was a sad ending to a formerly popular group, they said.

Ken thinks perhaps the group was a casualty of a shifting culture at UW Oshkosh.

"I think newly retired faculty and staff are most likely to identify with their departments, not the overall University. Many are probably still in contact with colleagues from their departments."

Life after retirement

Outside the campus, the Cooks are both very involved in their church. Barbara is active with the Oshkosh Branch of the American Association of University Women (AAUW) and on the board of directors for Evergreen Retirement Community.

Ken has kept himself equally busy since retirement. For many years, he sang bass in the Oshkosh Chamber Singers. He ran the 1991 Fox Cities Marathon and still exercises regularly. Currently, he volunteers in patient transport at Mercy Medical Center.

Last year, however, Ken took an unwelcome break from these and other activities after quadruple bypass surgery left him hospitalized for 54 days. Although it was a big scare, he happily reports that — thanks to great medicine and Barbara’s caregiving — he has regained his health.

Of all their many pastimes, traveling is their favorite. With a son and his family in Hong Kong, it is their No. 1 destination. Because their daughter-in-law is Japanese and three granddaughters speak Japanese, Ken is studying Japanese at UW Oshkosh.

“They speak English to our son and Japanese to their mother,” Ken said. “So they think that they should speak English to anyone who looks like daddy and Japanese to anyone who looks like mommy. So when I spoke Japanese to them, they said, ‘No Grandpa, you speak English.’”

The Cooks also have two more sons, one who is married and lives in Madison, and one who lives in Minneapolis, and a daughter, who is a 1994 graduate of UW Oshkosh and lives in Oshkosh with her husband and two daughters.

“Our five granddaughters bring much joy to our lives,” Ken said.

If you would like to send a note to the Cooks, please e-mail Barbara at cookb@uwosh.edu and Ken at kencook35@charter.net.