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Ken Davenport Interview, Director of Admissions at Wright State University

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Wright State University - Main Campus

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WRIGHT STATE UNIVERSITY
Retiree Association Oral History Project

Interview date: 7/24/2017

Interviewer: Dan Abrahamowicz (DA)
Vice President for Student Affairs, Retired

Interviewee: Ken Davenport (KD)
Director of Admissions, Retired

Dan Abrahamowicz: Hello, this is Dan Abrahamowicz, former Vice President for Student Affairs at Wright State University for 20 years, now a retiree and current member of the Wright State University Retirees Association. Today is Monday, July 24, 2017, and I am pleased to be interviewing Ken Davenport, former Director of Admissions, amongst other things, at Wright State University, and this is part of the retiree association's oral history project. Ken, thank you for joining us today and for your willingness to participate in our project. To begin with, tell us a little bit about yourself, your back ground and so forth. Where were you brought up, and where did you go to school?

Ken Davenport: Oh, wow. You want to go all the way back to that, to when I was a little guy?

DA: All the way back to that, yep.

KD: Wow, that's amazing. Well, I was born in Kentucky, in a coal mining camp in Kentucky in 1939. My parents during the war moved to Detroit, Michigan, and my dad worked for Diesel, which made tank engines, and I went to kindergarten there. But eventually when the war was over, he decided to move back to Kentucky, because he became the plumber for the company. He did the plumbing for the buildings and for the homes and so forth, and I often wondered why did he choose to leave a good job at Diesel in Michigan and come back, and of course I was too young at the time to understand any of that stuff.

DA: How old were you when you moved back to Kentucky?

KD: Probably, let's see, we moved back in '52, so I was about 13, and I entered the first year of high school here. We lived in downtown Dayton, on 4th Street.

DA: So he moved back to Kentucky, how'd you get to Dayton?

KD: We came back to Dayton eventually after several years there, a friend of his decided that he was going to come and build houses in Dayton, and my dad was one of

the guys that he called because he knew my dad was a good carpenter, and they helped build the old Huber Heights over in Wayne Township.

DA: Oh, yeah, all of the brick homes.

KD: Right, that's what they did, and then he went into another company that built garages, where they built them on the spot and then brought them to the home and put them on the plat.

DA: So you moved to Dayton when you started high school.

KD: [*Nodding*] I graduated from high school in 1956.

DA: Where did you go to high school?

KD: Kiser Hight School, in Dayton, which was one of the Dayton public schools, and I worked at Rike's when I was a young guy.

DA: Was that downtown?

KD: It was downtown, and I worked in the boys clothing department, it was called "The Campus Shop", it was for young men.

DA: What, that was a big department store?

KD: It was a huge department store, you know, it was like Hudson's in Detroit, or several of the other stores, it was part of a chain. And I worked there, and when I graduated from high school I wasn't really thinking about going to college, my mom and dad said I had a good job at Rike's, I was a sales rep, a sales person, and it was called "The Campus Shop", for young people.

DA: So you started at Rike's after high school?

KD: Right out of high school. But after a while I decided that I hated retailing, because I hated the Christmas season, and I hated Easter, and I hated just the whole package, and eventually I went home one night, and I said, "You know, I don't think I want to work in retailing, I think I want to go to college", and my dad said, "Why would you want to give up a good job and go to college?", and I said, "Well, because I really don't like the job I'm doing, and I don't want to go to work in a factory", which was what a lot of the guys I went to high school with did in those days. And Rike's, actually, they must have liked me real well, because when I started to go to college, they said, look, if you need to take time during the day to go to UD- which is where I went to school- you're okay, we'll keep you on the staff.

DA: So they kept you on.

KD: They kept me on the staff. I think they really thought I was going to get into what was called the buyers training program when I graduated, but I didn't want to do that. You know, you would be the manager of a department, and finally I decided not to do that, and I went to the University of Dayton in 1961, and majored in education, and when I graduated from there in 1965, I married my wife-

DA: Now, when you started at UD, what was your intention as a profession? To be a teacher?

KD: Business. Business, originally, but at that point I decided I didn't want to do that, so I went into the education program. So I went to UD, and graduated in '65, and of course we were married, and at that time I was offered a position teaching in Xenia at a middle school there, and I taught history and geography, and I did that for about three years, and then about 1968 or so a friend of mine that went to college with me came back to Dayton, and he worked in the Dean of Students office and was in charge of off-campus housing.

DA: At Wright State?

KD: At UD, and he asked me if I would be interested in a job in the Dean of Students Office, because they were looking for someone to do international student admissions and orientation, and I said, "Sure, I'll do that". And they gave me a salary that was about \$3000 more than what I was earning when I was teaching school, which was \$5000, and my pay there was \$8000.

DA: When did you start at UD? What year?

KD: I started in '65. Let me think about that a moment. About '61. Actually, I went there in '65. Let me think about that a minute, Dan. I graduated from UD in '65, so about '68, and I worked at UD for about two years, and interestingly enough, I got a phone call from Bruce Lyon, who was the director or the Dean of Students here-

DA: -at Wright State.

KD: At Wright State, and he says, "We're getting a lot of international students, and we don't know what to do with them, and I hear you do something like that at UD", and I said, "Sure", and he said, "Would you be willing to come out and talk to our staff?", and I said, "Sure". So I went out and I talked to him and a guy who was an older fellow who was the director of the graduate program, and his assistant. The interview must have gone very well, because when I got home my wife says, "They want you to call them out at Wright State", so I called and then he called me back and said, "We want to hire you", and I said, "Oh, okay, how much are you going to pay me?", and he said, "How about \$11000?" and I thought, wow, I'm on the road to success here!

DA: And so how long was that after- how long did you work at UD?

KD: I worked at UD about three years.

DA: So this was about '71?

KD: It was '70, actually. I think it was '70-'71 that I came here.

DA: What was your knowledge of Wright State at the time?

KD: Very little. I knew nothing about the campus. I mean, when I drove onto the campus, the four buildings were here and that was about it. It was about like going into the country, as you can imagine. So, I stayed in the Dean of Students Office, I was an assistant dean of students, my job was international student admission and orientation. But next year, Joanne Risacher joined the staff-

DA: In about '72?

KD: Yes, in '72, and she became the assistant [dean], and I became the Associate Dean of Students, and I was responsible then for clubs and organizations, the residence hall, student discipline, and a bunch of other stuff.

DA: Geez, that was like all the student affairs stuff, right?

KD: Exactly. That was about it, at that point.

DA: And at that point it was just the four buildings on campus?

KD: Four buildings, right, and they were in the process, I think, of building the gymnasium and the student union, if I'm not mistaken.

DA: And where was your office?

KD: Our office was right inside the front door of Allyn Hall, on the right. Dean of Students Office was here, and Admissions was next door, and the Registrar's Office was across the hall, and the Presidential Office was that way.

DA: So Bruce Lyon hired you?

KD: Bruce Lyon hired me.

DA: In '71 or so, and you were hired initially to do international student advising, recruiting, that kind of thing.

KD: And I did that for about a year.

DA: And then it expanded into all kinds of student things.

KD: Yeah, student affairs, student orientation, discipline, the residence hall- but Rich Johnson was there and I didn't have to do much with that. He would just call me with an issue from time to time, and should I go on from where I am after that?

DA: Yeah, keep going. Well, let's talk about that period of time. So, what was going on, on campus and with students? This was '70, '71, '72?

KD: Well, there was a lot of protest and stuff, you know, about the Vietnam War.

DA: Oh, sure. 1970. Kent State. Of course.

KD: Of course, and I just happened to be in Kansas, when I was there for a conference, and was reading about that. But we were involved with a lot of campus protests-

DA: There were protests here at Wright State?

KD: There were protests on campus, there was actually a gentleman who came from I want to say the State Department to talk about it, but a lot of radicals were in the stadium, and I thought it was going to turn into a fight of some sort, and they rushed the guy off campus, and several people were arrested, and I had to go testify as to who they were, and I can't even begin to remember who they were, several of them were brought to jail. It was a trying time, you know, quite honestly.

DA: Do you remember about how many students were at Wright State at that time?

KD: I don't know. I can't remember. I wasn't in Admissions at that point, so I don't know.

DA: Was Hamilton Hall there?

KD: Hamilton Hall was just opening. It opened the year that I went, because the guy whose job I took was the guy that opened it up, and then I got it the next year, but I had to live in a residence-

DA: So there were some residential students there.

KD: That was the only one. It was a difficult situation, because a lot of the kids shouldn't have been in the hall frankly, because of problems with discipline and so forth.

DA: So you mentioned Bruce Lyon hired you, he was the Dean of Students, and then Joanne joined you, what other persons were there that you remember?

KD: In that department?

DA: Yeah, at that time. Or even at the university. Or Student Affairs, talk about that. Student Affairs was who?

KD: Bruce Lyon.

DA: You, Bruce Lyon, and Joanne.

KD: Right, that was it.

DA: That's it. Did that Hamilton Hall person report to you?

KD: Yes. Rich Johnson was who it was. I think that's who it was.

DA: Rich Johnson?

KD: Yeah, I think it was Rich Johnson, if I'm not mistaken. It could have been Rich Johnson, or Bob Grant, who was later in the medical school, but I don't remember.

DA: Not THE Bob Grant, the Athletic Director?

KD: No, it wasn't Bob Grant, it was Bob and I can't think of Bob's last name.

DA: It was Bob somebody else.

KD: He's a physician in Dayton right now.

DA: I'll be darned.

KD: I can't think of his last name.

DA: And the president was?

KD: At that time, it was probably Kegerreis, I think.

DA: Golding, Kegerreis, okay. Any other persons stand out in your mind from that era?

KD: Yeah, Fred White, who was a wonderful guy. He was like the founder of the university. He was actually working in an office over on Achilles Hill, it was an old house. That was their office.

DA: Achilles Hill is up by the baseball field, right?

KD: Exactly, right down the hill from it. I'll never forget, Fred was the kind of a guy you could walk up to and talk to, and one day I saw him standing by the windows looking out into the plaza in Allyn Hall, and I walked by and said, "How are things going?", and he said, "It's not a good day", and I said, "Why?", and he said, "We have the greatest underground, water, electricity and everything, but every time someone sticks a damn shovel in the ground, the lights go out". He lived in Troy, Ohio, and commuted to campus.

DA: What was his job at the time?

KD: He was like the acting president.

DA: Oh, is that right?

KD: They didn't really have a president. Kegerreis was the guy that became that, the president. And I don't know where he came from, to be honest with you.

DA: Alright. So, let's see, from there where did you go?

KD: Well, interestingly enough, one of the guys who was a vice-president, guy by the name of, um, Andy Spiegel- I can't think of his last name, Andy Spiegel, I think- he was a difficult man to be around, kind of a nasty kind of a guy, I got a phone call on a Friday afternoon to come to his office, and I thought, Oh my God, this is one of those where they're going to fire you and have the cops take you out the door-

DA: Geez, had you done something wrong?

KD: Well, I thought I hadn't done something, but why would he be calling me to his office? Because he was in the wing, and I wasn't. And he called me into his office, and I said, "Why am I here?" and he said, "Well, I just want you to know that we've fired our Director of Admissions". Gib Langdon was his name [*Gilbert*]. Gib had come from Mississippi State or something like that, and he came to Wright State and he spent most of his time up in the gymnasium and the golf course, and the university finally said-

DA: Well, that's what I tried to do when I was here.

KD: Well, his wife later became a trustee at the university.

DA: No kidding?

KD: Yeah, she did.

DA: What goes around, comes around.

KD: So he sat me down and he talked to me, he said, "We just fired the Director of Admissions, and I want you to go over to the Admissions Office and take the job", and I said, "What does the Director of Admissions do?" and he said, "Hell if I know. Go over there and find out".

DA: And what year was this? A couple of years after you started?

KD: It would have been 1974, 1973-1974.

DA: So you became the Director of Admissions in 1973-1974?

KD: Well, kind of Director of Admissions, because there was another fellow, an African-American guy named Jim-

DA: Harrison?

KD: No, it wasn't Harrison. I can't think of his last name. As a matter of fact, his obituary was in the paper about three or four weeks ago. Jim Brown I think it was, but no, it's not Jim Brown. I can't remember. But anyway, they were worried about appointing me to the position, so they came up with the idea of splitting the admissions operation, and they would have somebody do outreach and recruitment, which was to be me, and Jim would be responsible for the records area, and he was in there for a while, and eventually-

DA: So you were co-directors.

KD: Co-directors, exactly, so we split up the staff, and he did the one thing and I did the other thing. So one day I saw an article that Kent State was looking for a director of admissions, so I applied for it and I was one of three candidates that they brought to campus, and I had a pretty good interview I thought, but eventually I lost the job to a guy named Bruce Riddle, who was one of my friends, he got the job. But Brage Golding, who had been our first president, had become the president there when he retired.

DA: At Kent State?

KD: At Kent State, and he called me into his office before I left, and said "Hey, I understand you were on campus" yada yada yada, and he said, "So, why are you coming here?", and I told him the story like I told you. Well, he said, "Well, thanks for coming, and I wish you good luck". So I got back to campus, and Brage had called Pat O'Brien, who was an assistant to the president, to tell him that I was looking for this position and I was a candidate-

DA: At Kent.

KD: At Kent. And Kegerreis called me into his office and said, "I understand you were a candidate" and so forth and so on, and I said, "Yes, I was", and he said, "Well, listen, I want you to be our Director of Admissions, and I'll find something for Jim to do, and in the meantime I'm going to give you a pay raise", and I thought, okay, fine. So Jim then moved over to something called "Minority Outreach" or minority- I can't remember what his job was, and eventually he moved on to something else, and I became the director-

DA: THE formal director. And what year was that?

KD: That would have been maybe 1974, '74-'75, something like that.

DA: So in '74-'75 you became THE Director of Admissions, which everyone knows you as, and you were Director of Admissions when I started here 20 years later, 20-some years later.

KD: I remember talking to you on the phone when you were thinking about the job.

DA: Yes, yes.

KD: You wanted to know 'Why should I come to Wright State?' I should have said, "You shouldn't". [*Laughs*]

DA: That would have been some good advice I think. [*Laughs*]

KD: You came from Toledo, didn't you?

DA: Yeah.

KD: I'm going to see Dick next week.

DA: Are you? Dick Eastop?

KD: Yep. We have group that gets together in Columbus once a year, and we're going to see him. His wife is in bad shape, she's got some health issues.

DA: Yeah, I know. Just for the record, he's the old Director of Admissions at the University of Toledo, and then became Dean of Admissions, then became Vice-President for Admissions, and then he was a consultant, and now he's retired, I think, for sure. So, anyway, '75, '74, you become Director of Admissions. What was being Director of Admissions like? And tell us about your staff and so forth.

KD: I had a young lady who had worked in the Registrar's Office by the name of Gail Fred, who was my assistant.

DA: Sure! Did she become Registrar later then?

KD: Yeah, she became Registrar later, after Lou Faulkner.

DA: When I started she was Registrar.

KD: She took the position because she didn't ever think I was going to leave the university and the Admissions job wouldn't be open for her. I think we were the only two that were actually doing recruiting at that time.

DA: And what did- go ahead with the staff.

KD: Those were the two that we had, and then I think I had a staff of maybe- at that point I had like four or five women that were in the processing area, if you will.

DA: Process applications and filing, communications and so forth.

KD: Yeah, all that sort of thing.

DA: And what was the nature of admissions work, in those days.

KD: Well, it was just basically outreach, because people didn't know about Wright State University, and our job was to try to- I mean, Ed Pollack, who had become the Vice-President in that era, wanted us to visit every high school in the state of Ohio, and I said "then you're going to need to hire me about four other people, because there's a lot of high schools in the state of Ohio". And I said, "Why don't you allow us to-

DA: And Ed Pollack was the Vice-President for Student Affairs?

KD: Exactly. He was Bruce's boss, before Bruce went to northwest Georgia. And I said, "Well, you can't do it with just two people".

DA: So just you and Gail were the recruiters.

KD: Right. But at that time, we were really pretty much just working the south and southwest Ohio. We went about as far east as Columbus, and as far west as just the western part of Richmond, in that area, not into Richmond but into that area. All the schools were out that way. And probably up in the northern counties- we didn't go into Celina because they had the branch up there at that time, and just that pretty much. We didn't do Cleveland and the far east at that point. Then we added some additional staff over the year, and did a pretty good job at visiting a lot of high schools. We did all of the college fairs that were there and so forth.

DA: Wow.

KD: So that was the history.

DA: So you went to- you and Gayle just traveled around, and then talk about the students. How did you sell Wright State at that time?

KD: I think we just sold it on our ability to talk about the great opportunities, we're a new university, we didn't have a lot of tradition, but we had a lot of possibilities for that down the road, and you can be a part of that. We offered a wide range of programs, you know, business, education, liberal arts, the whole spectrum of things. And of course in those days, we were probably a little less cost than some of the others, like the Miami's and the Ohio State's and so forth. But it was a tough job, of course, because everyone wanted to go to Ohio State or Miami.

DA: What was the typical student that came to Wright State in those days?

KD: A lot of them were local, within like the first 15 to 20 miles around here, but there are a lot of high schools around. You branch out about 35-40 miles and there's a lot of high schools, you know, Northern Cincinnati wasn't that far away, in those days.

DA: So probably cost and location were the keys.

KD: Because we didn't have housing, they could drive back and forth to school. That was another issue, because we didn't have housing.

DA: We just had Hamilton [Hall].

KD: Exactly, right.

DA: Were there other issues for students in those days that you can think of? Early days?

KD: No, not really, Dan. I don't think of anything that comes to mind.

DA: Your relationship with the administration of the university, what was that like?

KD: Very good. It was very good.

DA: Kegerreis was the president at the time.

KD: Kegerreis was the president, and I don't remember who was after him. It could have been... it was a guy, a little fella, he came from Iowa. Do you know who I mean?

DA: Yeah, right.

KD: I can't remember his name. Then we had the African-American president.

DA: Yeah. Harley.

KD: Didn't go over very well.

DA: Now, see, I loved Harley. I thought he was great.

KD: He didn't last very long.

DA: Right. Well, he passed away.

KD: Exactly. Then after that I can't remember who was president. You probably would know that better than I.

DA: Yeah. Goldenberg, and then Hopkins, and now, whoever it is now. So, you became Director of Admissions, and talk about the growth of your department and how things- who were the first hires that you made...?

KD: Well, I'd have to think about that for a minute. Well, I inherited a woman when they kind of closed the campus up in Piqua, and Judy Cathcart came down and became like the director of our records area, and there were three or four people over the era that were there, I'm trying to think who they were. Jeff King was one of them.

DA: Jeff King came from another department on campus?

KD: No, he was recruited, I think.

DA: By you?

KD: Well, I don't know exactly how we got his name, to be honest with you. But he came and he was good. He's now down at Vanderbilt, as far as I know he's still there.

DA: Oh, is that right? I didn't know that.

KD: I think I had a staff of what I would call the recruiting staff. Nancy Mercier, who was an associate director with me, she went down and went to West Georgia College for a while- I'm sorry, she went to Florida Atlantic, Bruce went to the other one- and then she finally retired, and she lives in North Carolina now and I talk with her a couple three times a year. She's not in the business, either. I think I probably had a maximum of five at one time.

DA: And as you look back, are there points where you noticed a change in the students that came to Wright State University? Talk about that a little bit.

KD: I think as the reputation of the university grew, and the housing continued to grow- we didn't have a lot but it continued to grow- we were beginning to see students from the Cleveland area, the Columbus area, the Toledo area, pretty much from around the state.

DA: So as opportunities to live on campus grew, the geographic nature of our student population changed-

KD: And we were going up against the University of Dayton which had a great reputation, and a lot of kids had parents and grandparents who went to school there, so-

DA: During some of those early years, was there anything going on off-campus that affected the university, to your recollection?

KD: You mean, like-

DA: Like any events that stand out in your mind?

KD: Off-campus?

DA: Off-campus.

KD: No, not really.

DA: Okay, and then the nature of admissions work itself. Can you mark changes where first it was all, you know, visit campuses, and then it was make phone calls, and then it was-

KD: It was just doing whatever you could. I think it was a lot easier in the early days because we didn't have the competition for this market, if you will. If the kid wasn't going to UD, we were next on the list. And of course if they couldn't get into Ohio State, because they didn't meet the standards or it was too crowded or whatever. Miami, of course, was another one, and they were geared to high talent students and out of state students and that kind of thing.

DA: Would you say that it was particularly challenging for Wright State Admissions people?

KD: Absolutely. I think it grew as the reputation of the university grew, you know, our numbers continued to increase. And of course in those days, the high school population was kind of like this [*motioning upwards*], and now it's like this [*motioning downwards*].

DA: Yeah, it was kind of going up.

KD: It was kind of going up. I always tell the story of when I left here and went to the University of South Florida, and they offered me a job there, and I said, "You don't need a recruiter, you just need someone to drive the students down here. Because we're getting 5000 more students a year".

DA: They just need someone to herd the students that want to come.

KD: Exactly.

DA: Enrollment management down in Florida is a lot different than it is in Ohio.

KD: It was a good experience to be there, but it was a difficult place to be in, because the guy I worked for, Harold Nixon, wasn't really my director of my job, and the guy I worked for I didn't like, so after a year I said, 'I'm going home', and he called me the night I left, Harold did, and he said, "Do you want to stay another year?", and I said, "Harold, I'd love to, but I just don't feel I'm being effective here, because of you know who, but everything seems to be okay". The operation was really a mess. You needed somebody that... I had a staff of 60 people there, Dan.

DA: You had 60 people?

KD: 60 people on the staff, and most of them were sitting on this big data processing operation, and even then they couldn't get applications processed very well, and I had a staff of maybe five or six that were doing recruiting.

DA: Now I remember when I started in '96, you already had a reputation in the state.

KD: Bad. *[Laughs]*

DA: No, no, no. There were some, and you know them better than I do. You, and Eastop, and some others.

KD: John, from up in Bowling Green, John- I can't think of his name all of a sudden. And Bob, in Cincinnati.

DA: Because even though the competition among public universities was intense- I mean, especially the Cleveland States, the Toledos, the Wright States, the Akrons, Youngstown- I mean, it was just bloody. But you guys all got along pretty well, right?

KD: Even guys as far east as Youngstown, and the guys in the Cleveland area, you know? I mean, the high schools were very receptive of us coming to visit, and our reputation, I think, just continued to grow, and the people who graduated were now teaching in the school or living in the cities and so forth. We'd see students up in the Cleveland area where mom and dad were with them and they'd graduated from Wright State, or they knew UD or whatever.

DA: Now, the year that I started, 1996, there was a falloff in enrollment, and I remember certain administrators complaining about admissions..., and my sense was that things were going pretty well. Because I had come from Toledo, which also had a falloff.

KD: Right. The enrollments were going down.

DA: And then the next year- so that would be fall of '97- it went up. It went up significantly, and you didn't even do anything differently, as far as I know.

KD: I don't know specifically about that. I mean, I know that the numbers were okay, they're not like today, but of course we're looking at a declining enrollment in Ohio. But I think we had a good relationship with our colleagues in other universities. You know, this dinner that we're having, there will probably be 7 or 8 other admissions guys there-

DA: Let's talk about that, so that's a reunion dinner of some admissions folks?

KD: Carl Gerbasi, who has been at Ashland University for most of his life, puts this together and we go over to Columbus and guys come down- Bruce Riddle comes down from Cleveland, Bob Green or Bob... I can't think of Bob's last name, used to be at UC,

Dick [Eastop] comes, Chuck Schuler who used to be at Miami, he comes but he has health issues now and doesn't come, and there's probably about 15 or 20 high school counselors from all over the state that come. Most of them are from bigger cities, they're not from the smaller towns, they're from the Clevelands and from the Columbus, Cincinnati, and Dayton area. We had a good working relationship with them, we really did.

DA: So you retired what year?

KD: It was about '98.

DA: '98? And what caused you at that year to retire? Because you were still a relatively young guy, right? How old were you when you retired?

KD: I don't know, I'm 76 now. No, 78 now.

DA: So early '60's?

KD: Yeah, early '60s.

DA: You didn't like the vice-president at that time, did you?

KD: Who?

DA: That was me. [*Laughs*]

KD: Oh, yeah. I heard he was a real S.O.B.

DA: Yeah, he was a S.O.B.

KD: No, I can't remember exactly why I retired, other than-

DA: -Because I recall it being a bit of a surprise to everyone. Because you were regarded as one of the principals- no, seriously- in admissions in Ohio, with some of the others we mentioned.

KD: I think I had a pretty good reputation.

DA: Yes, you did. You had an outstanding reputation.

KD: I always hired good people, even though Lillie didn't think so, but I thought I did. But I had a good staff, and they had a good reputation, and they did the job, and we could call any high school counselor, they could call us and we were always there to talk with them or have their kids come. Jerry Springer even brought his daughter to Wright State one time.

DA: Is that right?

KD: Yes, he did. He was more excited about them coming than even we were out at Wright State.

DA: So, when you think back upon this time, did you just tired of it?

KD: I wish I could really tell you why I retired, because I don't recall, other than I was getting close to the 30 years, as you know, but then all of a sudden, I get the phone call from Harold.

DA: Oh, that's when you went down to South Florida.

KD: That's when I went to South Florida, yep.

DA: And so did Joanne? Risacher?

KD: She had gone down the year before I did, and of course we were in contact, and she was telling me about the problems they had at South Florida and so forth. But Harold Nixon, who had been here- now, he left because of Harley Flack. That's why he left.

DA: Who, Harold?

KD: Harold did, yeah, and he went down there to become vice-president, and he called me and just said, "I hear you're thinking of retiring", and I said-

DA: Well, I think with Harold, his concern- Harold was the VP [of Student Affairs] preceding me, and his concern was they were reorganizing things, and the Provost was going to have some influence over the Vice-President of Student Affairs, and Harold didn't like that.

KD: I'm not sure of the particulars. I just know he had a big problem with Harley. Everybody had a problem with Harley, I think.

DA: I didn't, just for the record. [*Laughs*] So, admissions work. I'm kind of fascinated by admissions work, and how hard it is, and it strikes me that it was really hands-on. I mean, one thing that characterized you admissions guys all of those years was outstanding extroverts.

KD: Absolutely.

DA: Glad-handers, backslappers, wonderful.

KD: No question, absolutely.

DA: And that was kind of the style, wasn't it?

KD: It was, it was. Yeah, many times people would call and say, ‘We’d like to have somebody come for a visit, and we’d like you’- or Kathy or somebody, Gayle or Fred- because they had a relationship with those counselors that were there. But I think I had a pretty good working relationship with the high school people. I don’t recall the university ever receiving a complaint from a counselor about anything I did or some of the other staff did. So, you know, when we’d call they were always very receptive, unless they were having testing or some other thing. We’d go as far east as up in the far eastern part of the state.

DA: And when did that sort of start to change? From a hands-on, person to person sort of recruiting process, to something else?

KD: Probably as the numbers started to go down, it became more competitive, and it wasn’t a dog-eat-dog kind of thing. But you might make these visits, and you knew that they weren’t going to be as cordial as perhaps the counselor that was there before.

DA: I remember when I started, as I recall, part of your frustration was lack of resources, like to buy names or more technology. You were comfortable with your staff and everyone knew what they were doing, but there was increasing reliance on other kinds of things other than the personal.

KD: Oh yeah, buying names, or bringing in consultants who do all this great stuff. I mean, I’m intrigued by the recent conversation in the newspaper about the trustees talking about, “Well, what we need to do is to recruit more students”. Well, everybody knows that, but the problem is that they aren’t out there, you know, and you’ve got more competition, and the reputation has been blemished somewhat, considering all this stuff. I don’t relish the situation and I feel sorry for the woman who is the VP. I don’t know her, but they brought her in to create miracles and I don’t think she’s been able to do that.

DA: The VP for Enrollment Management, right. Okay, generally speaking, what’s your sense of how the campus has changed over the years?

KD: Well, let’s see. It’s very large, and parking is terrible, and it has always been terrible. Did you know that there was one time when the university was in competition with West Virginia about a trolley?

DA: No.

KD: Wright State and West Virginia were in a similar situation of kids having to park miles away, and there was some sort of a government agency that offered this opportunity, and Wright State was in competition, but West Virginia won it. So they were like a shuttle bus or a hanging shuttle, a streetcar kind of thing that would bring students up to the main campus. That would’ve been great, but it didn’t pan out. But West Virginia did it, and I think they still have it.

DA: I'll be darned.

KD: We began to see more and more students from out of the area as the housing developed. Of course that was an asset as far as I was concerned to recruit.

DA: More full-time, direct from high school, degree seeking students. That category became the university's bread and butter in the period of '96 through 2006.

KD: I always thought the university- we had this building downtown that just sat there. I thought that would have been a great place to do a graduate program for people who worked downtown, and could have gone right to class at that point. And it's just sitting down there rotting, unfortunately.

DA: What do you think is distinctive about Wright State?

KD: Oh my. I'll have to give that some thought. Well, it's young.

DA: It's still probably location.

KD: Location, it is for a certain sphere of people, maybe Columbus, Cincinnati, Richmond, and up north not quite to Celina, but up in that area. A lot of kids from the rural areas.

DA: Cost is a factor, right?

KD: Cost. Oh my gosh, cost is, yes. You know, I think more and more students are going to look at two-year schools, as we begin to say to start there and stay at home and then do your last two years, and some of them are even thinking of offering a bachelor's degree, aren't they? Some of the community colleges?

DA: Well, yes. Sinclair.

KD: That would kill us, wouldn't it? In this area?

DA: Well, I think there are details about that.

KD: With the degree programs.

DA: The degrees, yeah. Like they can only be in areas not already covered by local schools, or something like that. Like, they could offer a bachelor's degree in plumbing. Well, I don't know if that's [laughs]... don't quote me on that.

KD: I see wellness is a big deal right now, as a matter of fact.

DA: What is it?

KD: Wellness.

DA: Well, yes, wellness, or they have one on... what do you call these things, these flying things. Drones.

KD: Drones, right. Technology has changed dramatically, and a kid that wants to get into something that's thriving, that's a good area.

DA: Right. So you worked for Kegerreis, Paige Mulhollan, and Harley as presidents, right?

KD: Mm hmm. Harley Flack was in there, too.

DA: Harley Flack, that's what I meant. Then was Goldenberg... Goldenberg started when you were still here. You got a year of Goldenberg.

KD: He came for my retirement party up at the Student Union.

DA: Yes, he did.

KD: He was the president then, right. He served for quite a while, didn't he?

DA: Yes, he did.

KD: And he was the dean of the medical school, wasn't he?

DA: Before that, yes, right. So looking back, are there certain memorable experiences that stand out in your mind?

KD: I just really enjoyed working here and the people I worked with. I really respected them and they really respected me, I think, in some cases, we know that. I just felt it was a great... it was almost like it wasn't really work. It wasn't like you had to go, 'Oh my god, I have to go to work today'. I loved what I did, I loved interacting with people. I'm a talker, as you know. I loved talking to the counselors, I loved to go to college fairs and to have college nights. A great story about one of the assistant deans in the College of Business, we used to have this program at the University of Dayton, and we decided at one time that instead of just taking admissions people, we would go up to the upper level and have some of our faculty from our various colleges, and Bill... I can't think of his last name, he and his wife were in the College of Business-

DA: Here at Wright State?

KD: Yeah, here on campus. I can't remember his name. But this young kid came up to the table and said, "How's your business program?" and he starts into the AACSB and all this other stuff, and after about 20 minutes I walked over to him and said, "You could have told that kid that you guys were certified by the American Kennel Association and

he would have been happy”. I mean, you can’t talk too long to these people, because at these programs they’re trying to pick up stuff, and he didn’t take the time to... he talked about the certifications and all of that. That meant nothing to a kid. Tell us about some of your programs that are unique that a kid might be interested in, and they didn’t quite... it was difficult to work with faculty sometimes, because they didn’t really understand the concept of recruitment. Their program was the only program.

DA: And why do you think- obviously, your time here holds a special place in your heart, and why do you think that is? What was it about that?

KD: I guess it just had to do with the environment. It was a good environment to work in-

DA: -a sense of community, connectedness-

KD: Right. I saw the university grow as I grew. I mean going into a long established university that has a hundred years of reputation, it’s kind of difficult to crack it, but here you were a part of what was growing and what was going on.

DA: What are you proudest of in your time at Wright State?

KD: What am I most proud of. I guess of what I think I did in the admissions operations, in terms of developing it into a viable situation.

DA: Yes. I would say that. Having worked with enrollment management for many of the years that I was here, from ’96 to 2006, there was a period of growth in enrollment at Wright State in those ten years that was 2nd in the state, and enrollments weren’t booming at that time, you know? They were in the ‘80s and maybe in the ‘90s, but Wright State and the mechanism you created, and followed up by Cathy Davis and some others, kept that enrollment growing for a period of time.

KD: But now you’re looking at a declining population and a lot more competition, and colleges throwing money at students, particularly well-endowed schools, and so forth.

DA: Any major disappointments stand out for you?

KD: A major disappointment? Not really, I can’t think of anything. I was going to say you being Vice-President, but that’s not true. That’s not true at all [*Laughs*]

DA: [*Laughs*] Thanks, I appreciate that.

KD: Elenore Koch was a difficult person for a Vice-President.

DA: Elenore Koch was interesting, yes. She was also- just what a distinctive personality.

KD: Oh, absolutely.

DA: And talk about an extrovert, and outgoing.

KD: Oh my. Right out the door.

DA: Elenore was the Vice-President right before Harold Nixon, right?

KD: Right.

DA: The Vice-President for Student Affairs.

KD: She was a wonderful person to work for, because when you went to her, you knew immediately if she was going to embrace what you wanted, or she would say, “What do you need?” I went to her one time about the “Famous Ohio” posters, remember that?

DA: Yes. Yes, we had some framed, right. Ulysses S. Grant is on it, and-

KD: Yeah, and the first one with Jesse Owens and Roy Rogers. I’ve got three of them at home that I don’t know what to do with, and I’m thinking about giving them to the Dayton-Montgomery County Library, but I need to take them down there. I thought about Carillon Park, but they’re not really interested in paper, they’re interested in the Wright Brothers, and I love that about them, that’s where I volunteer now. But you could go into her office, and if you had an idea and she like it, she’d figure a way. But I remember one day I went into her office, she called me down about three times, and I walked up to the door and I said, “What the hell did I do now?” She said, “What do you mean?”, and I said, “This is the third time this week that you’ve called me down here about something that’s quite inconsequential”. A week later she took our entire staff to that big restaurant downtown in that tower.

DA: Oh, is that right?

KD: Not the clerical staff, but the professional staff.

DA: That was nice.

KD: You never really knew where she was, but she’d come to you with the most hair-brained schemes, and I can’t remember what they were, but I’d be like, “Elenore, it won’t work, I’m sorry”.

DA: I remember you taking me to a restaurant downtown. It was that Italian place, near-

KD: Dominic’s.

DA: Dominic’s. They were famous for the garlic dressing on their salad.

KD: Right. It stayed with you for about a week.

DA: Yeah. Because I was in this period where I was commuting back and forth with families one to the other, and I remember that you thought or observed that I was down in the dumps or something, and you just had to cheer me up, and all I remember is I smelled like garlic for a week after that.

KD: My life was a librarian, and she tells the story about she was leaning over the counter one time, and this little kid was trying to get a book, and this kid says, “Why does your breath smell so bad?” [*Laughs*], and it was because we had dinner there.

DA: Because she had dinner at Dominic’s [*laughs*]

KD: That’s gone now.

DA: Yes, I know.

KD: Because the hospital has basically sucked up that whole area.

DA: Yes, yes, that’s right where it was.

KD: Then of course the fair was right across the street, and this is the last week for it. But that was fun.

DA: So if you could describe, back when you started- or in the early days of the time you reflected so fondly of- in one word, what would it be?

KD: Dedicated.

DA: Dedicated?

KD: Dedicated. I think I came at a time that I thought had a lot of potential, because there was very little here but there was a big plan, and I think I was a part of that, frankly. I think I had a great reputation with the people I worked with on campus, in most cases, and of course all of the counselors around the state. I’ll probably see 10-15 of them next week when we have dinner, just to kind of catch up on things, because they’re all retired as well. Because they’ve been retired for a number of years, most of them. But they still get together, once a year. Carl does a great job. And I hope Dick come.

DA: How would you describe Wright State now?

KD: I think they’re- how do I say this- I think they’re struggling with enrollment, and I think the things that have happened these last few years have diminished their reputation. Like, no one seemed to be driving the bus, so to speak. I don’t know that the trustees paid much attention to what was really going on behind the scenes. Tom Keller, who I have lunch with periodically, and we’re going to see a movie this Friday-

DA: Who is he?

KD: He was the budget director.

DA: Oh, he was the budget director.

KD: He can't understand- he said "Every month when I was the director, I would take the budget right to the president and say 'Here's where we are, here's what's going on'. He said "I don't know if they're doing that anymore". He said, "I need to go over to the library sometime and look over the books".

DA: Oh, the president knew.

KD: Why did he let it get so out of hand?

DA: I don't know.

KD: You don't know, either.

DA: No, I don't. I have some hypotheses.

KD: No, you don't have to tell me.

DA: I'll tell you sometime.

KD: But it just seems like it just sort of like exploded all at one time. Boom, and then it just never-

DA: No, there were cracks, you know. Think of a dam. There were cracks, and water seeping through, and then all of a sudden, boom.

KD: I think the university needs to really take a look at the programs we offer.

DA: Academic programs?

KD: Academic programs. I think, you know, religion and philosophy, those ought to be in liberal arts schools, not here, and you ought to be focusing on the jobs of tomorrow. Because then they change, you know, the business college, maybe some of the liberal arts area, certainly engineering. Technology stuff is kind of-

DA: You see that as a niche of Wright State.

KD: And the medical school has been a great blessing to the university.

DA: But isn't that ironic, though. You mention the sciences and STEM and so forth, yet our most selected and well known programs are theatre and music, right?

KD: Well there you go, right. Tom Hanks and all of that.

DA: Yeah, right, and I have friends in Florida that think they want to bring their kids up here for the theatre program. From Florida. I mean, there's a couple of schools in Florida, you know?

KD: Well, when you think about all of the programs, that's the one that has certainly reached out. I mean, other than Athletics, they have reached out.

DA: Sure.

KD: And a reputation. I mean, Tom Hanks and David McCullough, my god, think about that. That's incredible.

DA: Right.

KD: They were at the park, by the way, but they didn't let them out in the park when we were there.

DA: What park?

KD: Carillon. I volunteer at Carillon.

DA: Oh, is that right?

KD: Yeah, I do it two days a week.

DA: And they were there at the park?

KD: After he was at Wright State, they brought Tom down, and there's a picture of him and David McCullough and Brady Kress-

DA: Oh, because of Wright Brothers stuff.

KD: Right, because of the Wright Brothers plane. I do work in the aviation building where I always get to talk about the Wright Brothers and so forth.

DA: Now? You do that now?

KD: I do that Tuesdays and Thursdays.

DA: That's cool. Now, is that a job, or do you volunteer?

KD: It's volunteer. I work in the Print Shop, because when I was in high school- this is an interesting story, if you don't mind. When I was in high school I was involved with

the student newspaper, and we had a really good student newspaper in the high school I attended, and the guy who was the teacher said, "Have you ever thought about a career once you've graduated", and I said, "No", and he said, "Well, you really seem to enjoy printing", and I said, "I do", and he said, "Well, I think I can get you an interview at the Dayton Daily News". And I thought, okay, fine. So we go down to the Dayton Daily News and it's going really great and I'm looking at all of these reporters and all of these people, and we went into the press room one day, and it must have been 100 degrees and all you could smell was ink, and I said "I don't want to do this". [Laughs]

DA: Maybe not. What else do you want to say about your time at Wright State?

KD: I think the 30 years that I was here was just one of the happiest times of my life. I mean, I had just got married, I had two great kids, I just loved the job, I loved the people I worked with, and it was just wonderful.

DA: Well, you were a pioneer of the university. No, I'm serious, and whatever greatness exists at Wright State now is largely due to you, and I mean that.

KD: Well, I think I was with a group of people that did that. The Lou Faulkners, the Dave Darrs-

DA: Well, you weren't the only guy, it's not all on you, but you were part of a group of people that made Wright State what it is today, or what it was a year ago [laughs].

KD: I hope the reputation gets better, but I think it's really going to hurt their enrollment.

DA: Let me tell you why I liked Harley Flack. Of all the presidents I worked with, I'd go in to see him, and he'd put his feet up, lay on his couch, take his shoes off and lay on the couch, and he'd say, "Talk to me about what's going on with the students. I'm just really interested in what's happening with them".

KD: Good for him.

DA: No other president was intrinsically interested in the students. They were interested in students because of enrollment, they were interested in students because of complaints, they were interested in students as a means to something, but Harley was interested in them as an end, and [was] intrinsically interested in them.

KD: Good for him, but he didn't last long.

DA: No, but he passed away.

KD: Well, Ed Pollack, who was the vice-president just about the time just after I came to the university, I hated going to his office. Because he was a prolific smoker, and his office and everything about him just reeked of smoke, and I hated it. Bruce Lyon was a

wonderful guy, he was the guy that hired me, you know, in Student Affairs, and he just basically said, "Take over, because I've got other things to do", and he was a great guy to work with. I really hated to see him leave, I really did.

DA: Well, Ken, thank you very much.

KD: Thank you, Dan.

DA: You're fascinating, and a wonderful speaker as always. Good to see you.

KD: Alright, thank you.