

President's Memorandum to Faculty and Staff

Office of the President
July 7, 2010

Former Ferris State University President Wenrich

It is with sadness that I report the death of J. William "Bill" Wenrich, who served as President of Ferris State University from 1984-88. President Wenrich passed away yesterday on July 6th. He was 73 years old.

Although it has been more than 20 years since Bill led Ferris, he has remained a part of the University. Recently, Bill played an important role in developing Ferris' Educational Doctorate in Community College Leadership. His own leadership of Ferris, combined with his expertise in community college education, made his advice in the design of this program uniquely invaluable. Just last year President Wenrich received the prestigious National Leadership Award from the American Association of Community Colleges.

This past February I travelled to Dallas to visit with President Wenrich. We spent a wonderful afternoon together and then were joined by his wife Martha for dinner. Even though he had been battling cancer for some time, Bill was fit and vibrant. We spoke for 4-5 hours and one would never have known he was ill. Bill's considerable intellect, profound insight into higher education and his extraordinary experience created a memorable experience that I will long remember. The hope was that Bill would be able to join us for April's celebration of Ferris' 125th anniversary. Although on the advice of his doctor he was not able to travel for our symposium of former presidents, I spoke with him by telephone from his home and recorded his comments to be shared with us here in Big Rapids. His remarks helped contribute to a remarkable day.

Bill initially joined Ferris in 1971 as a vice president working with President Bob Ewigleben. He returned in 1984 to serve as president of Ferris State College. It was in 1987 during his administration that we became Ferris State University. Bill left Ferris in 1988 to become chancellor of the San Diego Community College District and moved in 1990 to become chancellor of the Dallas County Community College District – the largest undergraduate educational institution in Texas. He retired from that position in 2003 and continued to serve as an emeritus chancellor. During his over 40 years of college leadership Bill also served as president of Canada College and Santiago College, and as chancellor of the Rancho Santiago Community College district, all of which are in California,

Bill had great vitality and remained engaged with Ferris State University. Those who knew him personally and others who simply benefitted from his leadership feel the loss of his passing. I know that you join me in extending our thoughts and prayers to the Wenrich family as they deal with this loss.