

A Tribute from the Faculty

We hardly knew him. Elden Rawlings had come to the School of Journalism and Mass Communication last July 1 as director, one of three candidates acceptable to the faculty from a pool of 67 applicants.

His job — to get the school moving again. And he did. By late August when all the faculty returned, he had set a whirlwind course for us. He wined us and wooed us and challenged us. And he led us.

He assigned us to committees, asked for recommendations, most of which he accepted. Oh, there were differences of opinion, but they were minor. He wanted what was best for the school, as did the faculty. And the faculty knew that Elden could help set the school on a steady course toward a long-range goal of excellence. He knew, and we knew, that it would not be easy.

But he wanted the school and its faculty to be first class, and he set about creating a new image. First, he moved ahead with remodeling the front office. The remodeling was barely completed in time for his faculty-staff Christmas party. He had begun the semester with a faculty-staff party, and he had scheduled another party at the beginning of the spring semester. He seemed to enjoy the role of host, mingling among people, filling their glasses.

He moved swiftly on all fronts. He completed a faculty lounge, replaced a delapidated water fountain, laid plans for an addition to Copeland Hall.

He appointed one assistant director and was searching for another. He established the position and hired a full-time administrative coordinator of student services.

Early in the semester, he guided through the faculty a new course for KGOU, the student radio station, which included a probable linkup with National Public Radio. It was a controversial decision, at least among students, but Elden believed that NPR would enhance their training and improve programming for the station.



Elden E. Rawlings

He encouraged the school's co-sponsorship with Reader's Digest of a two-day magazine article workshop in the fall of 1982 and was assisting in program development. And he set in motion plans to host the 1986 meeting of the Association for Education in Journalism, an organization in which he had been very active. In addition, he worked on the school's external relations, moving it toward closer ties with state news media.

He had a dream for the School of Journalism, where he'd gotten a master's degree in 1960. He had wide support among media and university administration, and the faculty was committed to help make the dream come true.

His untimely death on Christmas morning was a shock to all who knew him. But by the time the new semester began, there was a commitment to carry out the plans he had made. The regents appointed Professor Frank Heaston, Elden's assistant director, to serve as interim director, and search

procedures were begun. "Nothing has changed, except in personnel," Dean James R. Burwell told the faculty, promising continued administration support for the school.

Elden's career was wide ranging — from sports writer on the *Borger* (Texas) *News Herald* to editor of Nazarene Church publications to Fulbright lecturer to professor and head of journalism programs at Mankato State, Texas Christian, University of Miami and OU.

He had wide respect within academic journalism, according to Dr. Richard Cole, dean of journalism at North Carolina and a close personal friend. And Dr. Richard Gray, former AEJ president and journalism director at Indiana University, called his death a real loss to journalism education.

"He was one of the mainstays of journalism education," Dr. Gray said. "Year after year, he could be counted on for creative ideas, dedicated leadership and innovative approaches to solving the problems of journalism as it has moved into the perplexing age of technology."

And Dr. Jack Raskopf, an associate professor at Texas Christian, where Elden was chairman from 1975 to 1979, said he had changed that program by encouraging the ideas of its faculty.

"When you came in with a good idea, he'd say run with it as far as you can," Raskopf recalled. "He would pitch in and help. When you get energy like that, it's part of what separates great leaders from lesser leaders."

OU's journalism faculty did not have time to measure Elden's leadership, but it had gotten a glimpse of it. One colleague likened his brief tenure as director as "a little bit of Camelot."

Some might not go that far, but Elden had charted a new course for the school and set it moving in the direction he had envisioned for it. And in six months, that was quite an achievement.

—JUNETTA DAVIS
Associate Professor of Journalism