
PROLOGUE

Goodbye to Mr/Ms Chips Not an Easy Story to Write

Years ago I gave up writing the annual faculty retirement story — never again to trot out the dozen synonyms for “distinguished,” never again to divide 529 years of accumulated service by 25 retirees in search of a snappy lead. In part, my resolve was born of a dislike for change and a dread of goodbyes. But the real problem was that I could never make those stories come out even.

Within each group of departing professors, there is a superstar or two whose honors and meritorious deeds go on for pages. For these favored few, retirement is just a change of venue. An Edward Everett Dale or a George Sutton or a Clayton Feaver never seem to skip a beat as they quit meeting classes and plunge into “retirement” activities that keep them on the campus and blissfully busy. Other professors don’t make such readable copy; their career accomplishments are registered in the minds and hearts of their former students, and reporters are seldom privy to that information.

However, if any group of faculty could tempt me to break my vow of silence, it would be the retirement class of 1984. For size, quality and the roles they have played in the life of the institution, they have had few equals. Among the 25 new professors emeritus were five David Ross Boyd professors, two George Lynn Cross Research Professors and a host of others who were calling roll long before most of us knew there was a University of Oklahoma.

They included some of the young Turks of the postwar years whose personal commitment and increasing responsibilities gradually turned them into the academic establishment, almost against their wills. They stayed

through the lean years, gave more than they got and re-upped time after time. With a membership of 25, the Class of ’84 numbers just a few in a long succession of illustrious faculty, but seeing those names on a single retirement list was a real stopper.

We have given a lot of public attention to the retention of the Young Upwardly Mobile Professor during the current recruiting raids from other institutions; perhaps we have taken for granted those whose earlier dedication to this institution is its real strength. Unfortunately, you can’t prove a case for damages brought on by budget shortfalls and cutbacks by extolling the virtues of the professor who stays; you talk instead about the one who leaves — which may be media-smart but a little unfair, all the same.

So, for all those goodbyes left unsaid in the last 20 years, and for all those yet to come, a heartfelt “thank you” to the Class of ’84: William E. Bittle, anthropology; Gene Braught and Gail deStwolinski, music; Sybrand Broersma, physics; Harley Brown and Howard Clemens, zoology; Harry Clark, library science; Janice Donnell and VaRue Douglas, library bibliography; Ed Crim, economics; Seymour Feiler, modern languages; George Fraser and Dale Vliet, law; Billie Holcomb, education; Howard Larsh, microbiology; Robert Patnode and Vernon Scott, microbiology/immunology; Roy Male, English; Sam Olinketsky, art; Arnold Parr, finance; Martha Stockwell, nursing; Robert VanAuken, management; William Watson, sociology; Simon Wender, chemistry; William Wilson, architecture.

. . . And they each get equal billing. —CJB