

When Katie Davis leaves her home in far north Oklahoma City, climbs into the family car and turns on the ignition, the automatic pilot takes over and sets a course down I-35 to Norman, straight to the campus of the University of Oklahoma — or so it must have seemed for the past two years.

No, Katie Davis is not on the University payroll, although many of her admirers would favor that proposition; they contend that the consecutive terms she has just completed as president of the OU Alumni Association have been active enough to qualify her for tenure.

Davis' first year as alumni president was relatively routine, about what years of volunteering for worthy causes had led her to expect, a little long on ceremonial appearances, perhaps, a lot of smiles and handshakes, plus the typically hectic alumni spring — All-Star University, selecting recipients of the association's Baldwin teaching/travel grants and, of course, commencement.

Feeling that she was just getting the hang of the job, Davis agreed to take a second term. "It looked like a nice, calm year," she recalls. The nice, calm year soon became more complicated.

OU's budget problems took on crisis proportions, and Davis assumed a leadership role in marshaling alumni to lobby their legislators to support an emergency one-cent sales tax. When a search committee was formed in the fall to screen candidates for the Norman campus provost's job, Davis was the sole alumni member. Rushing to get its recommendations to President William S. Banowsky before Christmas, the provost committee was thrown temporarily into limbo by the sudden resignation of Banowsky himself. Davis was pressed into service on the presidential search committee as well.

"It was a little difficult with both committees going at the same time," Davis says of the January to mid-March period. "That's when I was going to Norman seven times a week, sometimes twice in the same day."

Davis confesses that she had not realized that serving on search committees was such "heavy business." Besides committee meetings, inter-



Katie Davis

views and receptions, she spent hours reading and evaluating résumés, work she describes as slow and tedious.

Time consuming as the work has been, Davis has found her assignments fascinating. "I'm a people person," she says. "I really like people. I basically like the candidates — all of them — and I learned so much working with the faculty. Take the members of the provost committee, for instance. Penny Hopkins and I are very different. My favorite thing is being a wife and mother and homemaker; she's the liberated woman, just as sharp as she can be. But we really like each other anyway."

Hopkins, the assistant professor of zoology who is president-elect of the OU Faculty Senate, has an equally high opinion of Davis' abilities and contribution to the search committee.

"Katie's input was invaluable," Hopkins insists. "She offered the committee a perspective that none of the rest of us had. Her questions were very intelligent and thoughtful and brought out the non-academic, human qualities in the candidates that are so important. And she always did her homework. If it took her a long time to digest the résumés, it's because she did the job so thoroughly."

"I do have a different viewpoint," Davis agrees, "and I think that the committees need my type of viewpoint. I judge so much on instinct, my feelings and emotions about people. But

I have learned to balance that with their academic accomplishments. I wouldn't want someone who didn't seem qualified, who hadn't taken all the academic steps. But it's also important to have a people person, and of course, if you can find both, that's wonderful."

One fallout of interviews with candidates from other universities has been ideas on a more effective role for alumni at OU. "That's so typical of anything you do," she says. "Just when you begin to understand the full picture, your term is up. I had the same feeling when I served two years as the alumni representative on the athletic council. It took me the first year to figure out what was going on."

With two degrees each from OU, both Katie and husband Jim Davis take their alumni status seriously. Katie was an undergraduate in child development while Jim was completing his law degree, but they didn't meet until he had begun his Oklahoma City law practice, and she was working on a master's in education.

"Jim is a strong supporter of OU," Katie says. "He'll tell you that everything he has he owes to the education he received at OU."

After a stint as a kindergarten teacher ("I loved the little people"), Katie concentrated on her daughters Kimberly, a Vanderbilt engineering graduate now living in Kansas City; Susan, who graduated from OU this spring in accounting; and Nancy, who just graduated from the new high school at Heritage Hall, which her mother helped make possible as a member of the board of trustees and architecture committee. Katie also has been an active Junior Leaguer ("until I was 40"), Pi Beta Phi alumnae president and member of the board of trustees and secretary/treasurer of Westminster Presbyterian Church, among other good works.

What will she do with all her free time now that the daily trips to the University are over? "Take a year off; get my life in order," she says, "then get involved all over again. I can't deny that I hate to give up being alumni president. I've loved every minute of it, and I will miss all the associations with the people at the University. But I simply must clean my house."—CJB