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Former BC President Dies

Geisert Led College From 1964 To 1994

By ERIN FLYNN Daily News-Record Jan 11, 2017 Updated 8 hrs ago

HARRISONBURG — Leadership — it's one word that comes to mind when many people think of Wayne Frederick Geisert.

Geisert embodied the trait throughout his 30 years serving as Bridgewater College's president.

"He seemed deeply committed to the college and all the individuals who were a part of it, and to its growth and its future," said Robert B. Andersen, the associate dean of academic affairs who began working as a professor at Bridgewater in 1990.

Geisert's leadership — as well as his humor and storytelling abilities — are being remembered by former colleagues and family members.

Geisert, 95, died at Bridgewater Retirement Home on Jan. 4.

A visitation is scheduled from 7 to 9 p.m. Friday at Johnson Funeral Service in Bridgewater, and a memorial service will begin at 7 p.m. the following day at Bridgewater Church of the Brethren.

He is survived by his sons, Greg Geisert of Keezletown, Brad Geisert of Lynchburg and Todd Geisert of Gloucester County.

Wayne Geisert was raised on a farm near Abilene, Kan.

“He enjoyed repairing things and seeing how things worked,” said Greg Geisert, 68. “And I guess I followed in his footsteps.”

In 1944, Wayne Geisert received his bachelor’s from McPherson College, a liberal arts school in Kansas that’s affiliated with the Church of the Brethren. Seven years later, he graduated from Northwestern University in Illinois with a doctorate in economics.

After graduating from McPherson, Geisert was a line officer and education officer with the U.S. Navy Reserve until 1946, when he began teaching speech and drama at Hamilton High School in Kansas

In the 16 years that followed, he served in various teaching and administrative positions at McPherson; Manchester University — then Manchester College — a liberal arts school in Indiana that’s partnered with the Church of the Brethren; and Kendall College.

Kendall College opened in 1934 with the intention of offering an affordable education in a Christian environment.

Geisert was named Bridgewater College’s president in 1964.

“When he came to Bridgewater, he set a new standard to running it like a business,” said Phil Stone who replaced him as president and retired in 2010. “Along the way, he devoted almost every ounce energy and minute of his life to build the college.”

A Hero To Many

When leading Bridgewater College, Wayne Geisert developed a close relationship with faculty, staff and students, including Stone, who was a senior when Geisert began his position.

“As a small college, we got to know our administrators really well,” Stone said.

In addition to serving as president, Geisert was involved in several community organizations, including the board of the Harrisonburg-Rockingham County Chamber of Commerce and the Council of Independent Colleges in Virginia.

Stone, who is now president of Sweet Briar College, became acquainted with Geisert through luncheons and conversations about the economy, politics and mutual friends.

The two got to know each other on a professional level when Stone became a member of the college's board of trustees in 1974.

"He was an exceptional leader and executive. He never feared making a decision," Stone said. "He had a lot of courage about what he thought needed to be done."

Geisert also was there to provide Stone advice as he transitioned into the presidency.

"I'm very grateful to him for all he did for the college, his friendship to me and his counsel to me," he said.

When Geisert wasn't spending time on campus or in the community, he was traveling nationally and internationally.

"He would take just about every excuse he could to take a trip," Greg Geisert said.

Wayne Geisert wasn't just an influential educator and traveling enthusiast. He was also someone that many, including his son, looked up to.

"He was always one of my heroes, and his father was one of his heroes," Greg Geisert said. "So, it sort of runs in the family."

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