



PHOTO BY COLLEEN RILEY

MILLER

Retiring President Sees New Directions For Drake

by Susan Rattay

President Wilbur Miller is doing a little housecleaning both at Drake and at home. He's sweeping out corners and sorting through a lifetime's accumulation of educational provisions to be ready for the changes in his personal life that will come with retirement. Miller also wants to ensure that Drake will be prepared to face the challenges in its future.

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On June 1, 1985, Miller will lock his office door for the last time. "I think I've reached the point where it would be good for the university to have new leadership. And good for me," Miller says. "A person must have some relief from the 24-hour pressures involved with running a university. It will have been 13 years, and that's way beyond the average tenure for a university president."

Miller has no definite plans beyond Drake. Instead, he sees a whole spectrum of possibilities. "It's kind of interesting to think that maybe I can start looking at things I haven't even thought of." Miller says he would like to do research in areas outside of higher education. Particularly he is interested in history and international affairs. He has also done a lot of work in his background of psychology. He may even, if he's in the "right spot," take courses in areas he has never had the opportunity to study. Travel is a possibility, although he doesn't feel constant traveling is "really a solution to learning and retirement." Miller's personal contacts at Drake are what he will miss the most.

"You realize there will be some gaps," he says, "but sometimes you have to slow down."

Miller's ties with Drake go beyond his tenure as president. Born and raised in Des Moines, he is the first president who has also attended Drake. Consequently, Miller feels especially good about the relationships that have developed between the city and the university. "The community has a lot of respect for the university, and that's something not all universities have," he says.

Miller attended Drake from 1941 to 1943. He had graduated from high school and had his sights set on becoming a lawyer and an accountant. So he started out in the College of Business Administration. 1941 was the year of the attack on Pearl Harbor and America's entry into World War II. The draft had been initiated sometime before that. This created a "different environment," Miller says. "Everyone knew you were in school temporarily, that sometime along the way — hopefully, you could complete whatever semester you were in — you would probably be subject to a draft."

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Attending college under the weight of such grave uncertainties did not, however, rule out opportunities to have a little fun. Miller remembers a group from the Women's Army Corps that was staying in Jewett Hall. Monday night was the main meeting night for fraternities, and they would go over to Jewett to serenade the Women's Army Corps. "Serenading was a big thing in those days," says Miller. "Fortunately,

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ly, we've kept Sweetheart Sing going which I still think is kind of fun." After he was discharged from the service, Miller switched to psychology and finished out his education in Denver.

Miller still recalls, however, that Drake for many years was "a little more localized environment in terms of the people that you knew." Students came predominantly from within the state, and a lot of those from Des Moines and other communities. "Another draw here was that it was a Disciples of Christ, a Christian college, or at least that was our heritage," Miller says. Drake was known for many years as having a strong College of Divinity. Recruiting used to occur in churches and still does in other church-related schools. "People didn't come here to have their faith enlarged or anything like that," says Miller. "They were just contacts. But even then, there was a strong Fine Arts College, a good College of Business Administration, and the Law College was well known. So, a lot of professional schools that we have now, were still dominant then."

The reasons students choose Drake now may be a little different. Miller feels that many times other students, especially relatives who have attended the university, play an effective role in

influencing a student's decision to come to Drake. Says Miller, "if that's going to be effective, it does mean that people leave with a pretty good feeling and that over the years, they have a feeling that they were well thought of and well treated and well educated and that Drake contributed to their social growth and intellectual life." Special programs and colleges also prove to be an important attraction.

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"One thing that's happened without a question is that we've made Drake a campus, and I think a reasonably attractive campus," says Miller. "I'm not saying we're completely through, but we're reasonably far along." Drake's most recent addition, Aliber Hall, and the renovation of Howard Hall are cited by Miller as crucial examples of the university's development. "We were in old houses. We were in Cole Hall. The English Department was scattered all over. That was not the way you wanted the future of the university to be." Miller remembers students once kidding him about the fact that the university hadn't had a swimming pool in 100 years. He told them, "I'll just say this, before I leave, we'll have a swimming pool," although as he admits, "I didn't know how or why or exactly when." All of the additions and renovations that have occurred during Miller's tenure have been aimed at providing a better environment with facilities to meet the needs of as many students as possible.

But student needs are shifting as enrollment declines and the government cuts back federal aid. Drake's future appears prismatic. "My biggest plea," says Miller, "is for patience, dedicated interest, and understanding. Higher education is going through a struggle right now and has been for some time. This means we will all have to work pretty close."

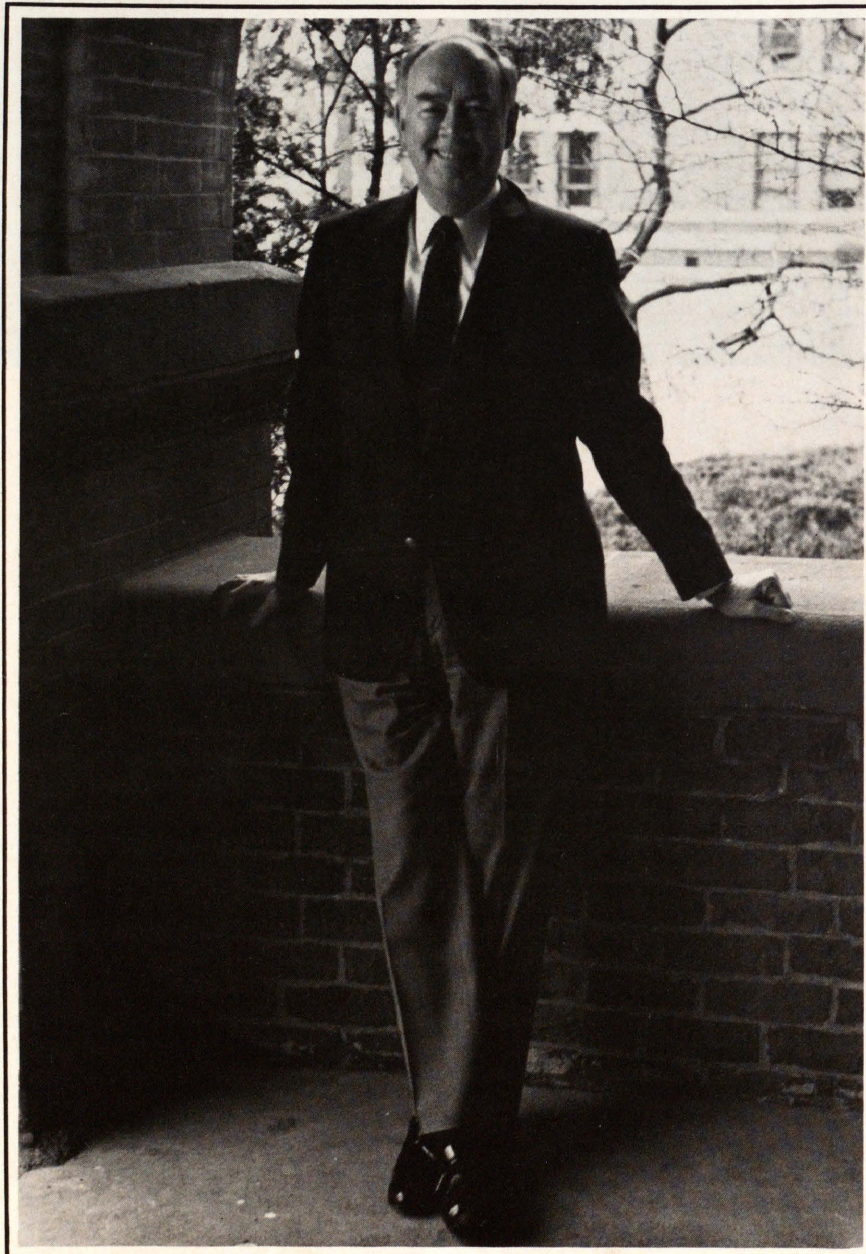
Miller is concerned about proposed changes in federal financial aid. He has written to and met with legislators to stress the detrimental effects these changes would have on private institutions such as Drake. "When they start putting an income cap and they start

putting an award cap and you're sitting in a private institution with reasonably high tuition or total cost of education — when you put it all together, there is no question that the private higher education group would be hurt more than public." Though he believes there will be some modifications, Miller is hopeful that cuts will not be severe as planned.

"I think we are probably going through now, just before I leave, some of the most significant evaluations of ourselves," Miller says. He has been instrumental in initiating plans to reorganize colleges and programs. The project is referred to as a Strategic Planning Process. "We've got to get a head start on what we know will have to be some decision making," says Miller. "If we hadn't implemented this strategic planning process, I believe a new presi-

dent would have had to do it."

The Strategic Planning Commission, headed by Dr. Gary Russi, has been meeting weekly since last September. Evaluations began in colleges. Forms were circulated by Russi to obtain information from departments in terms of strengths and weaknesses of programs. These strengths and weaknesses were then examined in academic and non-academic committees. "All of this," says Miller, "is the result of work that includes the faculty, administration, trustees and students. We're trying to evaluate and strengthen the programs and hopefully agree with some decisions that maybe certain programs should be disbanded, others should be at least kept where they are, and others look extremely promising and we should probably put more money in them for the future." □



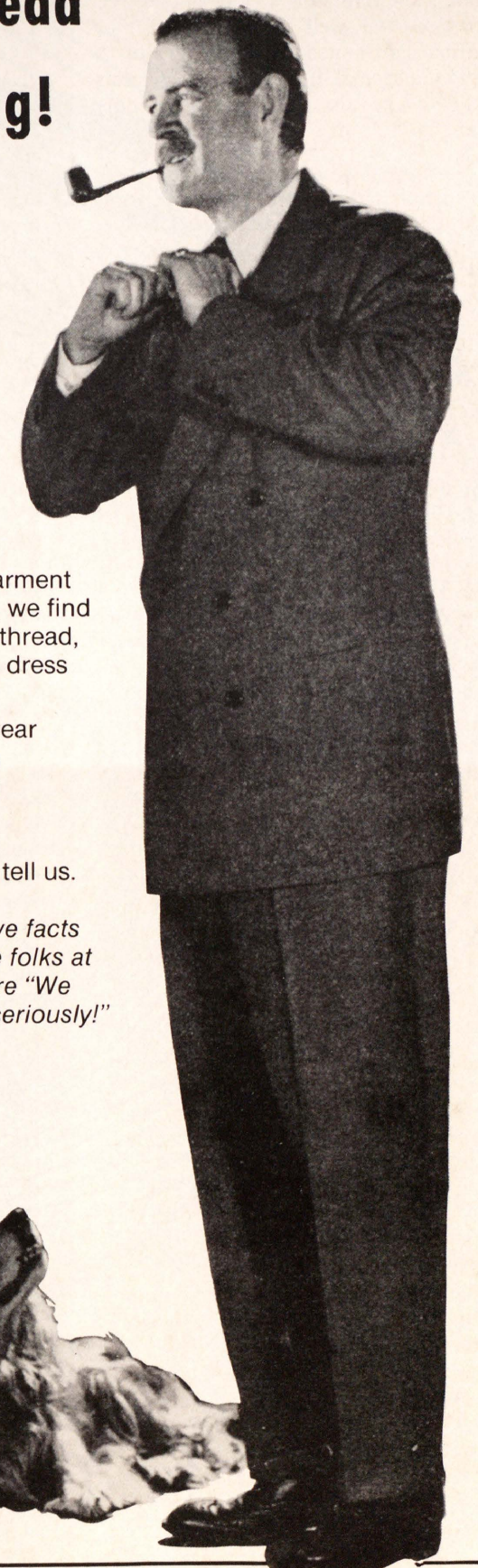
This qualitative renovation and restructuring of the university's programs is fundamental to the future of Drake. "Universities change," says Miller. "During the 60s and 70s, there was tremendous growth in the number of programs offered. A lot of those programs no longer meet the needs of students, no matter how much they may seem like sacred cows to some alumni. It is essential that everyone pulls together — alumni, faculty, staff and students."

Miller sees Drake as becoming more solidified in terms of its theme and direction. "The general future of Drake University is maybe smaller, maybe more compact, maybe not all programs will be continued." Some things, however, will not change. "We will keep a strong liberal arts and science college as our basic core for education coupled with strong, good professional schools." Miller says this has been Drake in the past and it is our strength. "This is what makes us more than just another small liberal arts college. This defines Drake University."

Miller says the one thing he would concentrate on if he were to remain is endowment and funding for support of faculty research, salaries and travel and for programs that should be expanded. "That's such an important next step for the next president. I almost wish I could get it started here," says Miller. "But, we can better concentrate on that now because we have all of these other things taken care of."

Those other things — getting the campus established, fighting financial burdens and reorganizing the university's programs — have at times made Miller feel bogged down in his role as problem-solver. "You get kind of isolated here occasionally and cooped up," Miller says. "You need to see that there are other things going on besides what happens in the president's office." When Miller feels this way, he says his biggest enjoyment has been to get out and walk around the campus. "You kind of forget that things are running pretty well out there and day by day operation is good. It has given me a tremendous lift to go out and walk by students and smile and say hello, and find that, by gosh, they're smiling and saying hello most of the time, too." Miller says this helps put things in perspective. "It makes me see that education is going on and it's here. People are learning and enjoying it and think Drake is a nice place to be. Who knows," Miller adds, "maybe that's the last thing I'll do before I leave — take one of those walks." □

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