

# PARKSIDE DELIVERS ON EDUCATION FOR



Jerry Covelli, 94, worked for the construction of a four-year university in southeastern Wisconsin to enable students to achieve a four-year degree without the added expense of living away from home.

The pieces of paper from the Wisconsin State Historical Society tell the story. Senate bill 48 introduced on Jan. 27, 1965, called for the building of two new four-year state universities. "... one of which shall be located in the Fox Valley and shall be known as 'The University of Northeastern Wisconsin' and the other shall be in the Racine-Kenosha area and shall be known as 'The University of

Southeastern Wisconsin.' Both collegiate institutions shall be established as soon as is practicable."

The bill was introduced by the Committee on Labor, Taxation, Insurance and Banking, by request of senators Gerald Lorge, Ernest Keppler, Joseph Lourigan (Kenosha), Robert Warren, Alex Meunier, Rueben LaFave and Taylor Benson (Racine). It

called for an appropriation of \$2.4 million from the 1965-67 general fund and estimated the cost of construction for the two schools at approximately \$10 million each. Lorge, Keppler, Warren, Meunier and La Fave were from the north central and northeastern portions of the state.

Substitute amendment 1, from June 15, 1965, explains a goal of the new universities: "... the expansion of educational opportunities to new geographical areas of the state eases the student's financial burden."

Prior to 1968 when both schools opened, students in the expanding southeastern and northeastern sections of the state were able to attend two-year University of Wisconsin colleges. Both Racine and Kenosha had a branch campus along with a branch campus in Green Bay. However, students had to leave the area, and spend additional money on room and board, if they wanted to complete a four-year degree. The establishment of four-year institutions in the third and fourth most-populated areas of the state would give students the option of earning a bachelor's degree without incurring the cost of living away from home.

Almost two years to the day after Senate bill 48 was introduced, Senate bill 38 was introduced by senators Henry Dorman (Racine), La Fave, Meunier and Warren, and co-sponsored by assemblymen Manny Brown (Racine) and George Molinaro (Kenosha). This bill gave power to counties to acquire land and transfer that land to the state for new collegiate institutions and research facilities. An interesting amendment to the bill (Assembly amendment 4) offered by Merrill Stalbaum (Racine) established a "plan B" of sorts, in case lands for UW-Parkside could not be acquired.

"... the Wisconsin Conservation Department shall make land within the confines of the abandoned Bong Air Base in Kenosha county available without cost

# PROMISE OF HIGHER SOUTHEASTERN WISCONSIN

for this purpose to the regents of the University of Wisconsin, and such University shall be known as the Major Richard Bong Memorial University.”

Four decades after all the political posturing, UW-Parkside - which could easily have been known by a couple of other names - prepares to celebrate its 40th anniversary.

If you are at all familiar with the university, you probably know the names of other individuals involved from the beginning: Irvin Wyllie, Kenneth Greenquist, and Bernard Tallent. These men, along with Molinaro, have campus buildings named after them in recognition of their efforts. Many others from Kenosha and Racine played key roles as well. One longtime Kenosha resident has been an advocate of the school from the very beginning. Jerry Covelli, now 94, was one of the people who helped take the dream of a four-year public university in southeastern Wisconsin and turn it into UW-Parkside.

Covelli may also be one of the most interesting advocates.

When he came to Kenosha from Chicago at the age of 14, he received a rather rude introduction to public education.

Covelli recalled a math paper in ninth grade where instead of getting the high mark he felt he deserved, he received a “big, fat zero,” he said. “The teacher told me that she didn't like the methods I used, and that furthermore Italians were not supposed to get an education they were supposed to work in the shop.”

With that kind of welcome, no one would blame Covelli if he turned his back on public education - forever. Instead, he became a proponent of change and inclusion.

Covelli held a variety of jobs - including that as a professional caddie rubbing elbows with the likes of Sam Snead - before landing back in Kenosha as a car builder with Nash Company and American Motors Corporation. He served his country in World War II as a lab technician and later served Kenosha County as a county supervisor and the city of Kenosha as a member of the city council. In 1999, he was inducted into the Southeastern Wisconsin Educators' Hall of Fame as a friend of education.

Through the years, his belief that everyone is entitled to an education drove his interest in the establishment of a local four-year public university.

According to a story written by then UW-Parkside professor James Foster that appeared in the Kenosha

Labor, Oct. 5, 1984, UAW Local 72 president Dick Thiel and Education Committee chair Jack Beni made the establishment of the campus their top priority in 1965. That's where Covelli and another Education Committee member Bert Cattelino entered the picture.

One of Cattelino's personal friends was Paul Alfonsi, a Republican assemblyman from Minocqua in northern Wisconsin. Covelli and Cattelino traveled to Madison in hopes of persuading Alfonsi to drum up support for Senate bill 48 among his northern Wisconsin colleagues.

“I went to see (Alfonsi) with Bert,” Covelli recalled. “And we talked, and naturally he wanted to hear what I had to say. And being Italian - that had something to do with it, too. So it worked out real fine.

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*The signing of of Senate bill 38 - George Molinaro to the right of Gov. Warren Knowles*