

Jack Keating: Reflecting

About 10 years ago, Jack Keating, then a candidate for the chancellor's job at the University of Wisconsin-Parkside, paid a secret visit to campus prior to his interview.

"I came in a day early, nobody knew I was here, and I wandered around," Keating recalled. "I called Pam and said, 'This is really a very beautiful campus.' I reviewed the background of the faculty ... you can put their credentials up against anybody."

Keating wasn't looking for a new job. He was the provost at the University of Alaska-Fairbanks and his wife, Pamela, was conducting research on K-12 education for the Federal Office of Education in Washington, D.C.

"Alan Oster, the head of Academic Search, had been after me at different times to apply for president positions," Keating said. "Then he called and said, 'I got a place that is just perfect for you because you're a builder.' He knew that I had been in charge of establishing two new branch campuses at the University of Washington."

The conversation that followed might be right out of the classic *Who's on First?* "I asked him, 'Where is UW-Parkside?'" Keating recalled. "And he said, 'Kenosha.' And I said, 'Where's that?' And he said, 'Well, it's right next to Racine.' And I said, 'Well where's that?' And he said, 'It's between Chicago and Milwaukee.' And I said, 'OK.'"

Once the geography had been established, Keating got on the phone to friend and colleague Tom George, then chancellor at UW-Stevens Point. Keating and George had worked together in Washington. "I asked Tom if this was a real job," Keating said. "And Tom said, 'I'll tell you the truth, it needs a lot of work, but the System is behind you and this is the type of thing you like to do, you like to see if you can get things going.'"

The timing of his first interview, however, left some doubt in Keating's mind as to whether he'd get the job. "My first interview was at the airport in Milwaukee," he said. "The day before the interview, Green Bay was playing Denver in the Super Bowl ... the whole place is going crazy. And then the Packers lost and it was like going from a raucous party to a funeral in one night. I thought, 'well there goes my job.' The next



Always interested in connecting with the students, Jack and Pam Keating serve pancakes at a Chancellor's late night breakfast during finals week.

day the search committee dragged themselves in early in the morning. However, I did get invited back to campus."

Parkside sold itself: The beauty of the campus, the pedigree of the faculty and the university's history as a research institution convinced Keating to accept the challenge. His first few days on the job, however, could well have caused a serious case of buyer's remorse.

"When I first got here, I was told I owed the UW System \$1.2 million," he said. "Nobody had told me that. In fact we couldn't find the letter telling my predecessor we owed that money. So I went up to Katharine Lyall (UW System president at that time) and pleaded that we didn't have any letter ... they couldn't find the letter at System headquarters, either. I talked her into lowering it to \$800,000. The reason we had a debt was because we hadn't hit enrollment targets in the previous years."

Enrollment was one of two key issues spelled out during Keating's interview with the Board of Regents. Immediately, he established a planning committee made up of many who had served on the search and screen committee. That group – which Keating called the best planning committee he had during his 10 years at

Parkside – established five enrollment task forces. "The fall of the second year we stopped the slide," he said. "And then we climbed back up – not as far as I wanted to go, but we began to significantly increase enrollment."

The second issue was getting the campus involved with the community. Within the first two months, a group of faculty met with Keating to convince him to back a service-learning initiative. "I've been behind service learning since I was at the University of Washington – I used to chair that committee," Keating said. "One, I got a mandate from the Regents that I had to do it; two, it's something I wanted to do; and three, here are a core group of people who really wanted to convince me to do it."

His early days on campus also brought about what Keating calls his smartest political decision. He decided to live on campus in the house provided for the chancellor – even though he wasn't supposed to. "Katharine Lyall told me I couldn't live in the house, that it had been condemned by the Regents," Keating said.

So he went house hunting and found what he thought was the perfect place, right on county highway KR. The two-lane road

On What Has Been Built

serves as the county line between Kenosha and Racine. KR has been compared to the Great Wall or the Iron Curtain, the dividing line between the two communities with a long, competitive history.

“I was at the (Racine) Journal Times and they said, “Where are you going to live?” I told them I have a perfect place right on KR,” Keating said. “They literally asked me. ‘Which side?’ I called Katharine and said I don’t care if (the campus house) is a doghouse, I have to live in it because this is a big deal for the community.”

Keating was given permission to live in house as long as several updates and improvements were made.

The house was his first glimpse into the complex civic and political environment facing the leader of a campus situated between the two cities.

“I tell Kevin Reilly (current UW System president), I should be paid twice. When other chancellors go to their chamber or rotary or whatever, it’s one meeting. They have a real focus on one community,” Keating said. “We don’t here and for a while it was confusing.”

In addition to national boards, Keating serves on local boards guiding economic development, workforce development, and charitable organizations in both Racine and Kenosha. “It tends to get to you after a while,” he said. “But you really do see the differences in the two communities, and there really are differences. It’s

sort of fun in one way, but you can’t laser-beam in and focus on one city because of what is going on with the other.

“Look around the System, the other campuses are in the middle of the town for which they are named. When you come here you have to say Kenosha and Racine or Racine and Kenosha. After about a year of doing that, I said, I’m never going to do that again, we’re regional. We have a round table and a white flag. The region can come and argue its differences across the table.”

Keating’s leadership skills paid dividends on campus as well. Along with increased enrollment and community engagement, he led efforts to bring diversity, inclusiveness and educational opportunities for all to the forefront of the campus identity.

“It might sound arrogant, but I think the university is more confident of itself than it was before I came here,” Keating said. “And the things I mentioned: engagement, diversity and opportunities, are succinct ways that people can reflect on the university and confirm that this is who we are.”

The next chapter in Keating’s life leads to Milwaukee where he will use the time to write and continue his research on human behavior during and after emergencies and disasters. Several other writing projects he put on hold as an administrator, can now be resumed.

There have been many highlights for the university’s fifth chancellor, with a recent event topping them all. “I



think the highlight of my,” Keating paused for a moment, “10 years here, was the last Regents visit. We showcased excellence in education ... I think the Regents were blown away by what they saw from student presentations.

One example was student researcher Patrick Liesch who impressed Board members with a presentation of his work, which has led to dozens of publications, and was funded, in part, by the Wisconsin Space Grant Consortium and the UW-Parkside Undergraduate Research Apprentice Program.

“Patrick Liesch could have made it anywhere, but he made it here in spades because he had real, personal attention,” Keating said. “He wouldn’t get that at a larger university under the best professors. Here the students work with the faculty one on one – that is a huge benefit.

“The fact that this university can reflect on itself and say we really do an excellent job in education is important. We keep pounding the Regents that we’re a unique place in the system. We’re not Madison where the average family income is a lot higher than it is here, and we’re not Eau Claire or La Crosse whose ACT scores are very high on entry. But we’re us and we do a good job; we can stand behind our graduates as well-educated and ready for the global society they will enter when they graduate. That’s what a university is about.”



As a standout pitcher in high school, Jack Keating dreamed of making it to “The Show.” His dream was semifulfilled as he tossed out the first pitch at Miller Park to kick off UW System Alumni Day with the Milwaukee Brewers.