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Marshall



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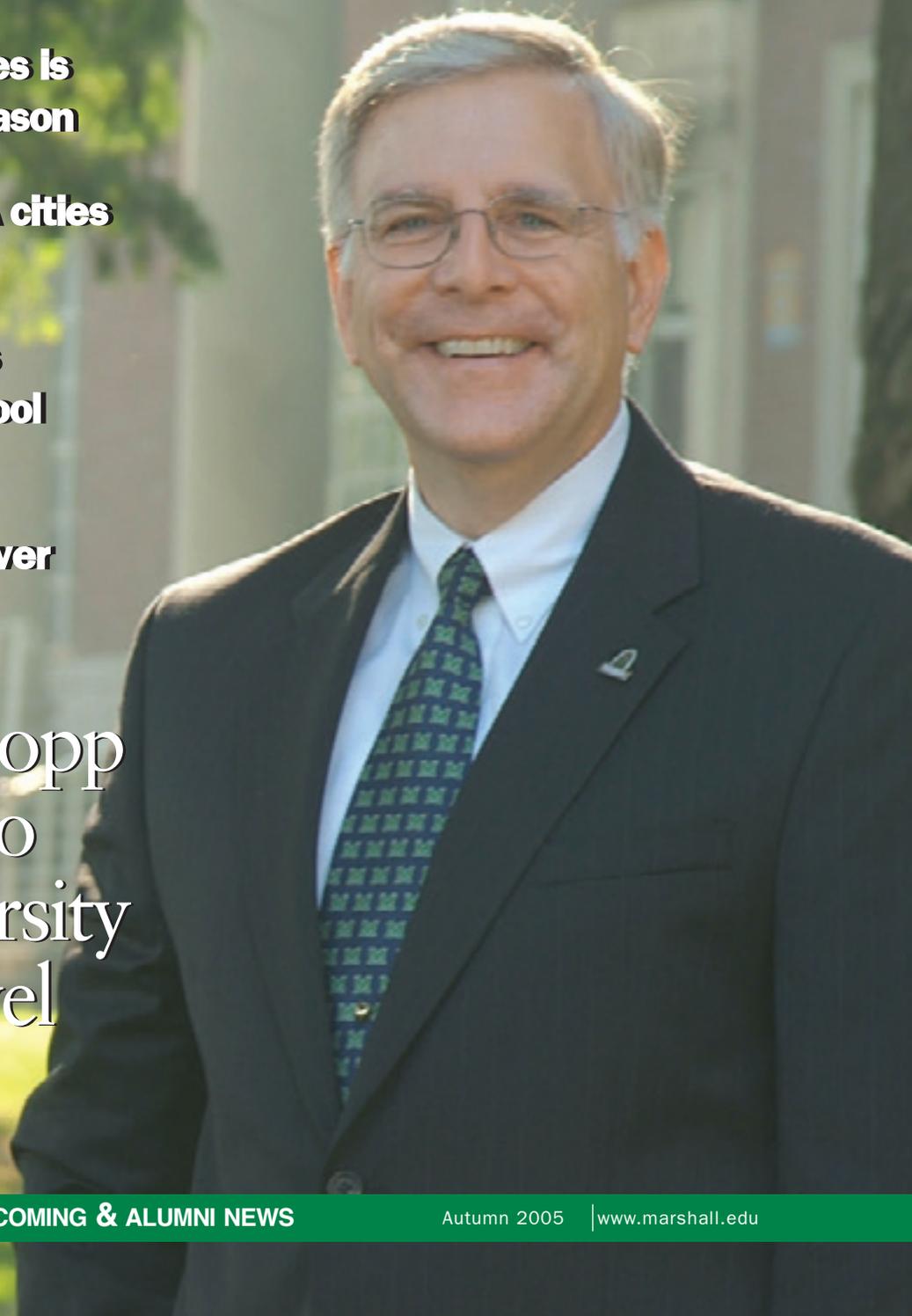
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Dr. Stephen Kopp stands ready to lead the university to the next level



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NEW MAN ON CAMPUS

Dr. Stephen Kopp, the unanimous choice of the search committee, is hard at work preparing to lead Marshall into a new era of academic prominence

Article by Jack Houvouras • Photos by Rick Lee & Rick Haye

At first glance, Marshall's 36th president certainly looks the part of an academic – distinguished silver hair, scholarly spectacles and a smart navy blue suit. But more importantly he has the pedigree to actually play the part. He possesses an undergraduate degree from the University of Notre Dame and a Ph.D in physiology and biophysics from the University of Illinois. His resume boasts of many administrative accomplishments and innovative approaches to the betterment of higher education. Those who meet him find him to be quite cerebral. If the conversation turns to science, look out. The new man on campus knows his stuff and often encounters blank stares as he waxes poetic about cardiovascular physiology, nuclear magnetic resonance spectroscopy, muscle biochemistry and other research projects from his laboratory days.

But tempered with his scholarly background is a warm and engaging man who smiles often and relishes a good laugh. He seems to possess all the traits necessary to lead Marshall University to the next level and perhaps that is why the 20-member search committee voted unanimously to hire him on June 5, 2005.

Dr. Stephen Kopp was born in Panama, where he spent the first three years of his life. His father, a physician with the military, was stationed at Ft. Clayton in the Panama Canal zone. As his career advanced, his father moved the

family to such locales as Leonia, N.J.; Buffalo, N.Y.; Paoli, Pa.; Elkhart, Ind.; and finally Burr Ridge, Ill.

"That was a tough time," Kopp recalls. "It seemed like we moved every year. But on the positive side, I met a lot of people and made a lot of friends."

At Lyons Township High School in LaGrange, Ill. Kopp was a promising student who found success in math, science and sports. These developing interests led him to apply to several colleges, including the University of Notre Dame.

"I went to Notre Dame in 1969 because I saw an opportunity there that I didn't see other places. At that time it was a melting pot of people from all walks of life. There were a lot of first-generation students there. It was exciting when I got accepted, but I learned quickly that if you want to get a good education you have to work hard to get it."

During the spring before he left for college, Kopp learned that his mother, a first-generation Italian-American, had lung cancer. The family was optimistic that she would beat the disease but by the end of his freshman year her condition had worsened.

"At the end of my first year my mom came to South Bend to help me move out of the dorm," Kopp recalls. "She had never been to the university and I was so excited to have her on campus to see the place that had such significance to her as a Catholic. I started off walking around campus showing

her all the sights but soon realized she wasn't behind me. And then it hit me how weak she was. So we got in the car and drove around campus. The one place I really wanted to show her was the (Our Lady of Lourdes) Grotto. If you've ever been on campus, you know that is a very special place. It was a moving experience for both of us."

During the fall of Kopp's sophomore year, his mother lost her battle with cancer.

"You talk about having the rug pulled right out from under you," Kopp said. "She was just a tremendous human being. I don't just say that because she was my mother. She had five children and every one of us felt that we were the special one. She had that ability. She was a person who was selfless with her children. She would do anything to help us."

It was after this difficult period that Kopp married his high school sweetheart. Actually, Kopp had met the former Jane Schade when he was in high school and she was a freshman in college. His older brother was dating her roommate and arranged for them to meet on a blind date.

"I don't think she knew I was still in high school," Kopp says smiling. "But in the end it didn't matter. It was love at first sight, and we have been together ever since."

The couple was engaged a year later. And even though his mother was extremely ill at the time, she still offered to help her son in any way possible.

"She told me that if we ever needed any financial help, she would go back to work to help us. As I sat there and looked at her, I thought, 'There's no way you could possibly go back to work.' But that selfless caring has stayed with me. It reminds me of the kind of person she was."

The two were married following Kopp's junior year at

Notre Dame. They recently celebrated their 33rd wedding anniversary.

"When you find somebody who's your soulmate, it's just incredible to experience the joy of growing older together. Jane and I have been very blessed."

The couple have two children. Their son Adam lives in Chicago and works in the law office of the Illinois lieutenant governor. Their daughter, Elizabeth, a physical therapist, and her husband, Matthew Bradley, M.D., live in Portland, Ore., and are the proud parents of the Kopp's first grandchild, Rachel.

Following graduation from Notre Dame, Kopp headed to Chicago where he earned a Ph. D in physiology and biophysics from the University of Illinois at Chicago.

"I suppose the reason I chose this field was because I wanted to understand how the human body worked in part because of Mom's illness."

From there the couple moved to St. Louis, where he did a postdoctoral fellowship at St. Louis University Medical Center. Then, it was back to Chicago to work on a National Institute of Health grant with one of the top muscle bio chemists in the world, Michael Barany.

"One of the greatest opportunities for me at that time was to work with Tom Glonek, who was heading up the nuclear magnetic resonance spectroscopy facility at the University of Illinois. This type of non-invasive research involving biological systems and imaging ultimately led to the MRI as we know it today."

While his years of teaching and research were extremely rewarding, Kopp realized early in his career that, unless he was willing to assume administrative roles, his opportunities to enrich the higher education process for faculty and students were going to be

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Stephen and Jane Kopp pose for a photo in the president's office.



Menis Ketchum (left) and Mike Perry (right) help Marshall's 36th president slip on the traditional green sports coat at the June 8 press conference.

limited. And that is how he jumped from research scientist to administrator.

"I threw my hat in the ring when the chairman of the physiology department at the Chicago College of Osteopathic Medicine retired. I was called and encouraged to apply and low and behold I was hired at age 32 to become the department chair."

After two years of working with the faculty, Kopp overhauled the entire program and developed a problem-based approach to the instruction of physiology. What resulted was a new way of thinking about the study of the human body.

"At the time, we thought it was a good model but we didn't realize how novel that model was for that time. We developed a matrix for evaluating student learning that is as relevant today as it was 20 years ago. Over the next 10 years we began to apply that model to other disciplines as well – the med school, pharmacy education, physical therapy education, all forms of health sciences. We began to realize how powerful this model was in terms of advancing the learning gains. We kept asking ourselves, 'How do we keep improving? How do we enhance the caliber of the student learning experience?'"

In 1990, the university president asked Kopp to work with various groups to create what would become the Chicago College of Pharmacy. He was later appointed to lead the

development of the College of Allied Health Professionals as its founding dean.

In 1995, Kopp was tapped again to help lead the creation of new academic programs somewhere else – Arizona. The university set up a campus in Glendale with programs in pharmacy, physician assistant studies, occupational therapy and physical therapy.

By 1997, as much as Kopp enjoyed what he was doing, he came to the realization that he was hungry for a more comprehensive university experience. He wanted to experience the richness and diversity that fine arts programs, humanities and social sciences offer. When an opportunity presented itself, he accepted the position as the founding dean of what later was named The Herbert H. and Grace A. Dow Foundation College of Health Professions at Central Michigan. In five years, he took a fragmented college and shaped it into one of the leading colleges in the university.

"How do you know you've made a difference in a college or university?" Kopp asks. "It's when you see the ideas, values and vision expressed every day by the people who are still there – that the vision for the future is one that is enduring."

In 2002, he was recruited by Ohio University to become its provost where he oversaw a \$540 million budget. Two years later he was named Special Assistant to the Chancellor on the Ohio Board of Regents.

“At each step along the way in my career, I began to realize that I could only go so far with ideas, before reaching a glass ceiling. I could either be satisfied with that or I could look for opportunities involving a broader scope of responsibility. And that’s what I found at OU and the Board of Regents.”

In 2005 another opportunity presented itself that piqued Kopp’s curiosity.

“I received a call from a friend who was a Marshall alumnus who said, ‘You’d be perfect for this position. Please consider it.’ The more I looked into it the more impressed I was. I think Huntington is a great community. It’s rich in terms of caring people. When we first visited the area, the friendliness of the people just drew us in. Both Jane and I felt like we have been here a long time.”

“The search committee voted unanimously to hire Stephen Kopp because he was a perfect fit for Marshall,” says A. Michael Perry, past chairman of the Marshall Board of Governors and co-chair of the search committee. “This university has invested millions of dollars in medicine and biotechnology and we needed a strong leader to guide us through these complicated arenas. After conducting extensive interviews we knew Dr. Kopp had the intellect and experience to help us formulate a comprehensive vision for the future. This is the right leader at the right time in the history of this institution.”

Kopp says, “People often ask me, ‘How do you decide which opportunity is right for you?’ And I tell them that it’s the people you meet who shape your decision. When you see people who care about the university as much as the people here do, that’s a tremendous resource and foundation upon which to build a better future.”



Student Leanna Lester gives the new president a tour of the campus.

“TO ME IT’S VERY IMPORTANT TO LET OTHER PEOPLE KNOW THAT THEY REALLY DO MATTER. AND EVERY STUDENT THAT COMES HERE IS IMPORTANT TO THIS UNIVERSITY.”

Kopp brings a wealth of experience to Marshall University. In addition to his strong background in science, he has spent years in the trenches handling finances.

“When you’ve been responsible for grants, you get to know about money,” Kopp says. “As dean at two different institutions, I was responsible for putting together pro forma plans for every new program we developed. I had to know startup costs, recruitment of personnel, what it would take to run the program, tuition rates necessary to produce a return on the original investment. I dealt with everything from admissions to registrar operations, financial aid eligibility, accreditation, federal funding – all the nuances of the institution. It was a tremendous incubator to learn about the intricacies and complexities of leading a university.”

As for Kopp’s approach to his new job, he said he plans to handle things in a somewhat unique manner.

“At a lot of universities when a new president is brought in there is a top level housecleaning,” Kopp said. “I don’t subscribe to that philosophy. One of the attractions when I came to Marshall was the very high caliber of people here in leadership roles. I was very impressed with the

people I met.” As for the immediate future of the university, the new president says that there are a number of challenges that must be addressed, the greatest of which is faculty pay.

“It’s hard to pinpoint all of the priorities, but certainly faculty salaries are a paramount issue. Additionally, we need a clear understanding of where we’re going in the biotech area. We need to establish what the critical priorities are, where we have the greatest opportunity to make an immediate impact. I think we need to examine what we’re doing with establish-

ing priorities for research and development. This gets into the economic development framework. That will mean working with both Huntington and Charleston. What is the asset base that we already have in the communities we serve? What do we have at Marshall similarly? How could these be brought to bear to improve economic opportunity and fulfill the promise of a better future not only for Marshall but also for Southern West Virginia and the Appalachian region? We must look at strategic partnerships and collaborative efforts. We need to examine where we have opportunities for new program development. We have to ask ourselves what cluster of academic programs do we feel will have the greatest opportunity to distinguish Marshall University. Most of all, we need to develop a compelling vision for the future and a five-to-seven year strategic plan that will put us on course for accomplishing that vision.”

For a man who has only been in the president’s office since July 1, he seems to have a firm grasp on the issues. When queried about the recent downward spiral of state funding for higher education, Kopp revealed his propensity for deep thought with his insights.

“One of the observations I’ve made is we often forget about how important people’s time is to what we can accomplish. I contend that the most valuable non-renewable resource in higher education is people’s time. We cannot buy back a minute or an hour in our lives. And it applies to students, faculty and staff. How we purpose people’s time matters more, I think, to what we can accomplish than throwing more money at it. The key question is ‘how do we align what we’re doing so that everything we do aligns optimally

with producing the greatest gains for the university in terms of the goals we’re trying to accomplish?’ Certainly there is a need for more resources and I’ll be the first to admit it. However, when I was at OU we accomplished more in a shorter period of time by asking people how what they are doing was contributing to the foremost goals of the university.”

And for a university poised to capitalize on the emerging biotech industry, Kopp seems the perfect choice to lead the way. Marshall’s search committee must have had that in mind when it tapped him.

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“Well I can’t speak for the committee,” Kopp says modestly, “but I think what I bring to the community is a deep understanding in an applied and theoretical way of how we can use biotechnology to develop intellectual property that ultimately has the potential for commercialization. In many ways I can talk the talk and understand what’s going on.”

Finally, for all those Herd fans who want to know what the new president’s position will be on athletics, Kopp provides an answer that should please the faithful.

“You have to look at my background,” Kopp explains. “I grew up thinking I was going to be a major league baseball player. Being a fairly decent athlete provided me with a certain level of confidence that I used to take on new challenges. I also coached for 10 years. What I’ve come to realize is that sports competition prepares young people for the challenges of life. Overcoming adversity, learning to play as a team and learning the strategy of the game is the essence of it all. Sports is a chess game.”

Today, Kopp spends most of his time working but recently took up the game of golf, a sport he describes as the ultimate challenge.

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a lot of games. It's a total mental game. You're standing on the tee and you look out and see a pond and you think to yourself, 'Man, don't hit this ball in the water.' But that's exactly where the ball goes. I continue to marvel at how the subconscious can influence what happens on the golf course. Arnold Palmer had it right when he said, 'It's the greatest game ever invented.'"

Dr. Stephen Kopp begins his era at Marshall University with a great deal of promise. He brings a wealth of experiences to the job dating back to his days in college at Notre Dame. Those four years in South Bend shaped his thinking and left an indelible mark on his life.

"Notre Dame just drew you in. It was hard to put your finger on what made that place so special. I read an essay recently in the Notre Dame Magazine and the author hit the nail on the head. He wrote that the soul of the university is the people who care selflessly for and about the students and their future. From the maintenance workers to the resident advisors to the faculty to the rectors, they'll do whatever it takes to help every student succeed. It's people who have devoted their lives to Notre Dame. They work there but it's also their calling. It goes beyond Catholicism; it goes beyond religion. It's the concern and caring that people express everyday naturally in their interactions with young people. They truly care very deeply about every student that enters.

"I've tried to capture that in my life in terms of what I do and how I interact with people. To me it's important to let other people know that they truly do matter. And every student that comes here is important to this university. I'd like to help develop that mindset and that sense of purpose here. Not everybody is going to embrace it, unfortunately, but for those who do it's going to make a huge difference in the future of Marshall just as it has at Notre Dame." □

Jack Houvouras is a 1988 graduate of the W. Page Pitt School of Journalism and Mass Communications at Marshall. He is the publisher of the Huntington Quarterly, St. Mary's Today and Marshall Magazine.

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