



Change Agent

By Charlene Hankinson

Since his arrival on the Findlay College campus in 1973, Edward W. Erner, Ph.D., has seen a lot of change in the institution. In fact, he was a driving force for change in his several administrative roles, including serving as vice president for academic affairs. During this time Findlay evolved from a struggling, small liberal arts college to a growing, multi-disciplinary university.

Humble, unassuming and compassionate, yet a determined visionary, Erner has had considerable personal and professional long-term impact on the institution.

After serving as the director of the Ohio College Three and the Northwest Ohio Consortium for six years, both based at Findlay College where he administered state and federal funds, Erner was asked to help expand the Weekend College program in 1979, and in 1982, was appointed dean of the Office of Community Education and Extended Studies.

Named vice president of academic affairs and dean of the faculty in 1987, Erner helped administer a period of unprecedented academic change.

Not drawn from the traditional academic ranks, Erner came uniquely prepared for the job. After earning degrees at Hanover

In his roles as administrator and teacher, this unassuming servant-leader has been a catalyst for change at Findlay.



College and Indiana University, Erner pursued a doctorate at Ohio University (OU) in interdisciplinary studies in college administration, human relations, counseling and student personnel. From 1963-72 he held five full-time administrative positions at OU while completing his Ph.D. and helped to establish five OU regional campuses. Those experiences proved critical to the tasks he would later undertake at Findlay.

Remembering his years as vice president, Erner commented, "Thinking about the creation of new programs, marketing ourselves, hiring the right people, establishing the right guidelines, looking out for quality: these were the fun daily challenges."

Erner recalled participating in cabinet strategic planning retreats at the Pennsylvania farm of then-President Kenneth Zirkle. "What we were doing, we were dreaming about the future," he said. Discussion centered on what it would take for the institution not only to survive but also to thrive. "Our biggest danger was thinking too small," Erner noted.

In 1989, Findlay initiated a master of arts degree in teaching English to speakers of other languages (TESOL) and bilingual education in April and changed its name to The University of Findlay on July 1. In quick succession, six more graduate degrees were added, along with a number of new undergraduate majors, before Erner retired in 2002.

It was not a simple process to establish new graduate programs, and new master's degrees needed to evolve out of strong undergraduate areas, Erner pointed out. The University developed a market niche for its graduate programs by building curricula to create practical results and provide information that enabled graduate students, most of whom were already employed, to advance in their careers, he said.

Erner remarked that the graduate programs, as well as enhanced undergraduate majors and minors, helped to improve the University's academic image and attracted a greater number of highly qualified students.

In 1987 when he became vice president, the full-time-equivalent (FTE) enrollment was 1,307. By 2002, the University had grown to a total FTE of 4,000 for both undergraduate and graduate programs. Erner is the first to say, "Obviously, it was a team

effort. There were lots and lots of people extremely involved in making this all happen. It was a very exciting, demanding time."

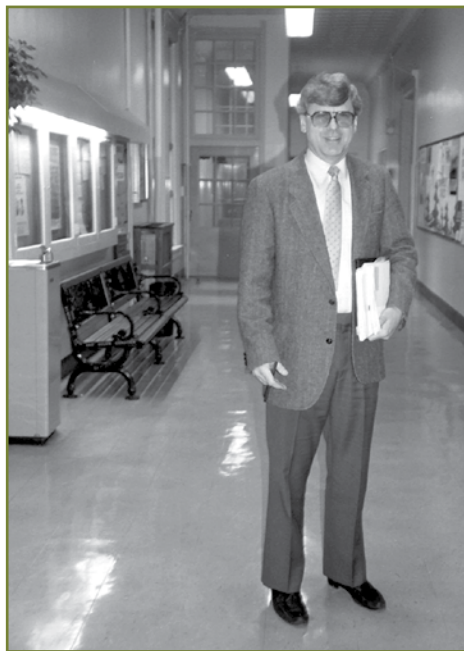
In retirement, Erner is researching the latest studies on brain functions and servant-leadership roles. He teaches a course on women in leadership for the master of arts in liberal studies program. His research has impacted his own views on leadership. Asked if there was anything in his career he would do differently, Erner said unhesitatingly that he would have worked harder to develop additional female and minority leadership opportunities within The University of Findlay.

He and his wife, Virginia, a retired music educator, are proud of their own accomplished daughters. Jana is a pediatrician in the Findlay hospital system, Kristi is a physical therapist in Point Pleasant, W.Va., and Melanie is a professional bassoonist for symphonies in Colorado and Wyoming.

Erner invests his time in the growth and development of people. He is a member of the local long-term flood recovery committee and serves in the Stephen's Ministry of First Presbyterian Church, which provides caring Christian listeners for people who are experiencing difficult circumstances. He also is an informal mentor to two UF students: a freshman male and a female graduate student. He volunteers with ECLIPSE, through the Community Foundation, encouraging young people to participate in community service projects. He and his wife also sing with the UF Concert-Chorale and their church choir.

Reflecting on the difficult process of institutional change, Erner recalled that at first some

faculty members were opposed to introducing nontraditional undergraduate programs and master's degrees initiated by innovative leaders. "There was this really ingrained notion that we were a small liberal arts college," Erner noted, saying that many questioned whether the institution should adopt these new endeavors. In time, most recognized the new programs provided significant advantages and embraced the changes. "If I look back over all the years, that was one of the biggest challenges that I addressed, helping that thought process to move along and broaden our vision," he said.



Erner as Vice President of Academic Affairs in 1987