

A Tribute to Al Van Wie
Wooster Rotary Club
October 10, 2005

Unless you've recently moved to the area from somewhere like Outer Mongolia, today's honoree probably needs no introduction. He is, nonetheless, most deserving of our recognition for his numerous contributions to our club and our community, as well as to collegiate athletics, both locally and on the national level. It is my genuine privilege to pay tribute to two dear friends, our Past President, "the Dutchman" Al Van Wie, and to his lovely wife, Judy. They are truly a team.

Al was born in Schenectady, NY, where he and his brother were raised during the Depression by their mother, whom Al describes as the other powerfully influential woman in his life.

Al entered the Navy immediately after World War II, and thanks to the GI bill, became the first person in his family to attend college. It is our good fortune that he chose the College of Wooster for that pursuit, arriving here originally in 1952. While a student at Wooster, he met Judy Tilford, who later became his wife. Judy's father, Paul, as some of you will recall, later became the mayor of Wooster.

As a young college grad, Al then began an 8 year stint as a high school teacher and football coach, first in northern Michigan, then in southern Ohio, then back to Michigan, where he also obtained a master's degree at Northern Michigan University, before being prevailed upon by COW President Howard

Lowry and football coach, Phil Shipe, to return to Wooster as an offensive line coach, assistant basketball and track coach, and PE instructor.

With exactly one season of experience as an assistant basketball coach under his belt, Al found himself in charge of the highly successful men's basketball program at the College of Wooster, following in the footsteps of the legendary Mose Hole, when Mose's replacement left after just one year. Al agreed to accept the position for one season while a permanent replacement was sought, but was still there 20 years later – having become, at that time, the second winningest coach in the Ohio Athletic Conference – second only to Mose. In addition to his coaching responsibilities, Al held the position of professor of physical education and athletics, later becoming chair of the department, and then adding the title of Director of Athletics for Men – a position he held until 1991.

Early in 1982, Al was one of the Founding Fathers of the North Coast Athletic Conference, and the author of the new conference's constitution, which became a model for the other Division III conferences.

As if those duties were not enough to keep him busy, Al also served in a number of national leadership roles with the NCAA:

First, on the Women's Intercollegiate Athletic Committee, the committee that was responsible for bringing women's athletics under the auspices of the NCAA. I might add that Coach Van Wie was an ideal choice

for this committee, since women's athletics at the College of Wooster achieved parity under his leadership, even before Title IX became a federal mandate in the early 1970's.

Coach Van Wie's second NCAA assignment was on the prestigious Basketball Rules Committee. It was during Al's service on this committee that both the 3 point play and the 45-second rule were proposed, debated and eventually adopted, changing the game dramatically. Judy will tell you that Al opposed both of those rule changes. Al will tell you that both rules – like all the modern rules of the game, were driven by television, a factor that weighed heavily in his initial skepticism of their value. Al admits, however, that both rules have proven to be beneficial – and not just in terms of commercial broadcasts.

Despite the fact that Al did not always see eye-to-eye with his colleagues on the Rules Committee, he obviously had the respect of his fellow coaches and athletic directors, nonetheless, since he was elected to serve on the NCAA's elite governing board, known as the National Council, from 1985-90, and was selected as the NCAA Vice President in charge of all Division III Athletics in the entire country from 1988-90. Again, Al cites as his most important accomplishment in this capacity the expansion of opportunities for women in athletics, including the addition of championship play opportunities.

Al has also served on the Executive Committee of the National Association of Collegiate Directors of Athletics, and in numerous services to the community. In addition to serving as President of this club, Al has been a

Wooster United Way Campaign Chairman; a long-time member of the Boys' Village Board and President of the Boys' Village Foundation; a member of the Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors; a member of the Wayne County Republican Central Committee, and a Sunday school teacher, Deacon and Elder of the Westminster Presbyterian Church, to name a few.

Al has also been the recipient of numerous awards. He is a member of the Wayne County Sports Hall of Fame, the COW "W" Association Hall of Fame and the Wooster Area Chamber of Commerce Wall of Fame, 2002 Recipient. Al was honored several years ago at the Final Four Tournament for his extensive community service, and the Al and Judy Van Wie Scholarship was created to honor their dedication and long-time service to the Wayne County Committee for Crippled Children and Adults.

It is extremely fitting that this Club has named one of its most significant service projects after this gentleman. The Al Van Wie Rotary Classic combines three of Al's passions – COW basketball, the provision of athletic skill instruction for youth of both genders, and a helping hand for those in need through People to People Ministries, where Judy is a regular volunteer.

Al and Judy, we are extremely grateful that you chose to settle in Wooster.