



Writing a New Story

The Retirement of Provost Philip N. Gilbertson

BY JOYCE McCALLISTER

“When I was a child, I used to dream about running a camp for learning,” Provost Phil Gilbertson told those gathered at an April retirement reception. “It wasn’t until I was well into my Pacific days that I realized that was a child’s description of being a provost.” Gilbertson, who retired June 30, reflects on his time at Pacific and looks ahead to his next adventure.

His wife, Carole, says he can't wait to get out the door in the morning. His longtime assistant, Debbie Miller, says she hears the office door open, and he is up the stairs before she can count to 10.

"It's probably because I take the stairs two at a time," he says. Faculty have called him the Energizer Bunny. He says it's all because he has the best job in the world. But after 14 years at the helm of Pacific's academic units, Gilbertson is leaving Pacific to follow his muse.

"I look forward to enjoying the creativity and the beauty of the world, rather than organizing it and trying to improve it," he told Carole, who is a researcher for Pacific's Advancement Services. A large crowd of friends, students and colleagues honored them both at a reception in the DeRosa University Center Ballroom April 29.

"I've always known that I am an artist at heart," says Gilbertson, who has been a painter and poet for most of his life. "Now I want to do something different; I need to work in a new medium."

The couple will travel in Scandinavia this summer and fall, with an Italian sojourn planned next spring, to explore art they find intriguing. Gilbertson's current interest is leaning toward stone carving and metal work with large sculpture. They are building a studio to house his projects and plan to continue living in Stockton. Carole plans to return to playing her flute.

"I have a real sense of adventure about it," he says. "That's part of the excitement: to be a brand-new student." At the same time, Gilbertson admits he will miss being at the university.

"That's why I want to write the new history of Pacific," he confesses, "because I will still be engaged." The former English professor will undertake this project over the next five years. Publication is scheduled to coincide with Pacific's 165th anniversary in 2016.

"This was never just a job for Phil," says President Emeritus Donald V. DeRosa. "He treated it with such passion and energy. He is a man of remarkable integrity, and is truly honest and straightforward." Gilbertson was Pacific's first provost, a position DeRosa established shortly after he came to the university in 1995. "I wish I could have met his parents, who produced this person of such self assurance and directedness."

"My father and all of my uncles were ministers," Gilbertson says. The third of six children, he grew up in South Dakota and received an undergraduate education at Augustana College in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, where he met Carole.

"Bach brought us together," he says. "I was singing in a classical choir, a very big deal on campus then, and we decided to tour with a production of Bach's 'Magnificat,' for which we needed a small orchestra. The choir director found the best flute player, and there



The Gilbertsons' daughter Erica (left) and son Nate (right) made a surprise appearance at the April retirement reception.

was only one open seat on the tour bus as I got on — next to her." They've been married 45 years this June and have two children, Erica and Nate, and four "adorable, talented" grandchildren.

"I was pulled into administration at the age of 32 by my colleagues, who wanted me to become head of the English department," says Gilbertson of his path to leadership. He moved from teaching into administrative positions at the University of Idaho, Wartburg College in Iowa, Texas Lutheran College, Doane College in Nebraska and Valparaiso University in Indiana.

"Education is a sacred calling," Gilbertson says, and he feels that his religious household gave him the spiritual basis that engages

his soul. He finds that renewing spirit in the family's Flathead Lake, Montana, retreat, where he has spent summers since 1953. He and Carole purchased land there in 1972 and built their house in 1982.

"It's where I spend time reflecting and reading, painting, writing poetry, fishing, boating,

hiking," he says. And for 14 years he's returned to Pacific renewed and refreshed to immerse himself in the hiring of deans, improving enrollment, reviewing academic programs, and strategic planning and budgeting for all the projects the university has engaged in to provide a premier student-centered education.

"I have been fortunate as a first-year President to have Phil as provost," said Pacific President Pamela A. Eibeck. "His wisdom and vigor have changed this University and have helped to shape our direction in innumerable ways."

Asked about his greatest accomplishment, Gilbertson mentions the strong deans he has recruited and hired. He has been instrumental in the hiring of all the current deans as well as other top academic administrators.

"The work of the deans is to empower faculty to empower students in learning and personal growth," he says.

Gilbertson established Pacific's Council of Deans, which includes the deans of the nine schools and the library and graduate studies; assistant and associate provosts for professional and continuing

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education, enrollment, research, curriculum, faculty development, diversity and international initiatives; and an academic budget officer. The upper management layer in the Provost's Office was instituted under Gilbertson's leadership. When he came to Pacific, his office consisted of only himself and two assistants.

Gilbertson has prioritized leadership for diversity in his office. Pacific now has more diversity and cultural variety than ever, both among faculty, staff and students, and in academic and extracurricular programming. The university has adopted a Statement of Diversity and Inclusion underlining its commitment to a respectful and inclusive community.

The assistant provost for Faculty Development directs the Center for Teaching and Learning and provides programming and resources to help professors become more effective teachers and scholars who engage students more actively in learning.

"Technology was an absent enemy when I arrived," says Gilbertson of information services, which was also in his brief. "We didn't have a mechanism to handle academic computing." It required a huge commitment of time and energy to understand the technology needs and requirements, Gilbertson says, and not a little frustration on all sides to bring the university to the current level of efficient and effective service. Tremendous improvements in technology include robust academic software, plentiful smart classrooms and making the campus wireless — with much more to do.

Gilbertson was instrumental in promoting and implementing the values of the DeRosa administration and developing "Mission, Vision and Priorities 1996–2001 and 2002–2007," a defining strategic plan that evolved into what is now "Pacific Rising 2008–2015." He was an essential advocate to combine planning and budgeting to ensure that budget decisions were based on university priorities. He chairs the Institutional Priorities Committee, a university standing committee made up of faculty, staff, students and administrators to advise the president on planning and budget priorities.

"The university has improved the quality of academic programs and has more faculty fully engaged in teaching and research," he says. Gilbertson is pleased with the caliber of Pacific's faculty and the backgrounds and experiences they bring. He also takes pride in the student engagement he sees in the rich learning environment of the three campus communities.

"In 1996, there wasn't enough going on," says Gilbertson of the student experience when he came to Pacific. "There wasn't a lively sense of engagement — in learning or the community. Now with experiential learning a component in all our programs, a push toward undergraduate research and the social element thriving, there is a vitality here that means there is far more to do than students can handle."

He is proud of Pacific's holistic educational experience, which combines a strong liberal arts program with a fully developing professional awareness. He has also been committed to increasing study abroad and extending it to include faculty who want to teach in other countries.

"We want to double our numbers and to expand work-based learning abroad," he says, noting Engineering and the School of International Studies' successful student experiences in this area. He and Carole have traveled widely on behalf of the university

in the past few years, making three trips to China as well as trips to Africa and the Middle East to develop and enhance educational exchange programs. This spring they traveled to Venezuela to visit alumni from the former Elbert Covell College and strengthen the university's new InterAmerican program. *(Read more on page 16)*

"I am so impressed with the willingness of the people of Pacific to seek improvement," says Gilbertson. "To strive for excellence, to critically examine Pacific to make it better — to turn this 1924 onion field into an elegant garden of delights."

Gilbertson says he is not a person who lives with regrets. "I acknowledge my mistakes, try to correct them and move on." He says he doesn't have personal heroes, but admires Leonardo DaVinci for the breadth of his creativity and learning, and Marcus Aurelius and his tremendous insight and wisdom about leadership.

"Phil was always able to go beyond the problem at hand, striving to improve and strengthen," says DeRosa. "His mark will live as long as there is a Pacific."

"One of my favorite quotations is 'visions are dreams with deadlines,'" Gilbertson shared at the reception this spring. "That has been the watchword of my career, and it also defines my future. I have set a clear five-year plan — my own personal Mission, Vision and Priorities — that is both inspiring and ambitious, and I get to do it with the person whom I most count on, Carole."



The Gilbertsons spend time nearly every summer at their Montana cabin near Flathead Lake.