

The history and significance of Roberts Chapel on campus

LOGAN LEPISCOPO
For the Yellow Jacket

At the heart of Waynesburg University stands a three-level, 120 foot tall, 20,400 square foot chapel. Roberts Chapel is named after Dr. Roy Roberts, who pledged that his estate, when he passed away, would go towards building a chapel.

According to President Douglas G. Lee, Roberts never got to see the finished structure. He only saw the pictures for what it would look like.

Adding a chapel onto campus had been a plan for a while, but it did not go into effect until the transition from Waynesburg College to Waynesburg University in 2007, according to Lee. It took a year and a half for the chapel to finish being built on Sept. 24, 2011.

Upon completion of the chapel, a ceremony was held inside the finished building when 400 people attended the ceremony to hear performers such as J. Christopher Pardini and David Allen Wehr, according to Anamarie Lipinski, published April 22, 2021 at theclio.com.

Inside the chapel hangs a large Japanese

scroll, held inside a frame with a plaque beside it, explaining how the scroll was acquired, according to the entry at theclio.com. The scroll has the verse Luke 18:16 painted in Japanese. Lipinski's account explained the origin of the scroll. Waynesburg graduate Dr. M. L. Gordon spent a lot of his time in Japan as a missionary. Gordon and his wife had an elementary school established in Kyoto. The scroll remained at the elementary school until Gordon passed, and the scroll was then donated to the university.

The chapel stands near the top of the campus hill and overlooks almost all of campus.

"Stand at the top of the chapel... standing at the highest point where it is about faith, look over to the stover campus center which is service... and then down to Miller Hall which is learning," Lee said three different parts of the Waynesburg University campus display the University's mission.

Chaplain Joshua Sumpter spoke about Roberts Chapel and its significance to the campus and its connection to the late Chancellor Timothy R. Thyreen, who was president during the construction of the building.

He said, "The chapel

represents the heartbeat of our mission at Waynesburg University."

Roberts Chapel has held numerous different events since being built in 2011; services, Upper Room, memorial services for students who have died and other events. One individual who spoke at Roberts Chapel that Sumpter mentioned was the Rev. Paul Abernathy.

Abernathy is an Orthodox Christian priest who works with the Neighborhood Resilience Project in the Hill District of Pittsburgh.

According to Sumpter, the two times that Abernathy came to speak for the University the COVID-19 pandemic restricted students from being able to physically go and listen to his message.

Sumpter shared a story about Thyreen that referred to Thyreen's passion and love for the students and university itself.

"I heard stories that if Thyreen saw students wearing shirts from other schools, he would take them to the old bookstore and get them new Waynesburg University gear... Thyreen really believed in Waynesburg's mission."

Editors note: Micah Leith contributed to the reporting for this story.



Photo courtesy Rebekah Vaughan



Photo courtesy Ben Champ

TOP: View of the Stover Campus Center from the Roberts Chapel steps. Bottom: Aerial view of Roberts Chapel

SERVICE

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in 2015, according to Dr. Thyreen.

King performed at Chancellor Thyreen's inauguration as president and sang at three of his daughters' weddings. King will be performing a Swedish Christian hymn "Children of the Heavenly Father," as an homage

to Thyreen's Swiss roots.

The arts will be highlighted throughout the memorial. Student performances will be done by the University Lamp-lighters led by Melanie Katana. Director of Music Ministry and Organist, Mark Anderson, of Shadyside Presbyterian Church will perform as the organist throughout the service.

"It's a full weekend, it's one that our fam-

ily needs," Dr. Thyreen said. "I think it's a time to come together for the community."

In an email, Dr. Thyreen said that there would be memories shared from the Chancellor's brother, Daniel Thyreen, and his long-time friend, Mark Fox, who is also a trustee of the university. There will be a short reception after the service in Marsh Center.

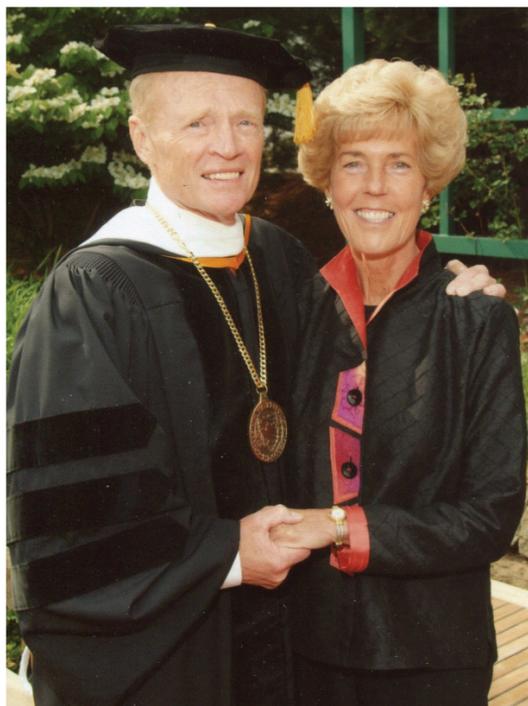


Photo courtesy of President's office

The Thyreens were married for 56 years



Photo courtesy of President's office

President Thyreen delivers his inaugural address



Photo courtesy of President's office

President Thyreen with Corella Bonner

THYREEN

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According to Lee, the connection between faith and learning is deeply intertwined and further underscores the commitment on display throughout Chancellor Thyreen's life.

"It shows what faith can do when God calls you to a task. God will provide the resources to finish the task," he said. "You notice another connection is every plaque has a Bible scripture giving glory to God or a message to those that read it about who God is and God's grace and truth in this world."

According to a press release, Waynesburg University doubled enrollment, added masters and doctoral programs, along with numerous academic programs, and created the Stover Center for Constitutional Studies.

The third pillar of the University's mission is service, which supplements faith and learning. According to Dr. Thyreen, this was an equally critical focus for the chancellor.

"He always would use the term, you know, making a difference with your life. And he meant it, she said. "Our approach was that community service was really at the very heart of being a Christian and seeing and depending on God to provide the energy and the means to do that."

One of the most significant changes to the University's commitment to service was the institution of the Bonner Scholars program in 1990, according to Dr. Thyreen. Waynesburg was the first school in Pennsylvania to be awarded the Bonner Scholar program. A university press release attributes over 750,000 hours of community service to Waynesburg students as a result of the Bonner program.

In 2004, the Bonner Foundation established a scholarship at Waynesburg.

"At a time when we were moving towards community service and serving God and people, there really was no money to do that," Dr. Thyreen said. "That's when the Bonner Foundation came and awarded us a very prestigious scholarship program. And so that just kind of convinced anybody who had questions as to whether we should be

--THE MAN--

going in this direction that this was really being awarded and seen and recognized."

Thyreen's impact on the community extended far beyond his work as president and chancellor at Waynesburg University. Chancellor Thyreen also was on a number of boards and led numerous organizations, according to the university's press release. He served on the board of directors at the Western Penn-

sylvania Conservancy, was chairman of both the Association of Independent Colleges & Universities of Pennsylvania and the Pennsylvania Association of Colleges & Universities and served on the Pennsylvania Lawyers Client Security Fund Board.

He also provided other higher education presidents with advice about how to lead their programs, according to Dr. Thyreen.

"We would go to presidential meetings who were trying to bring about a better educational experience. He had good contacts with presidents that would call him and would talk to him at meetings. And they depended on him when they saw that we were being successful in moving in the direction we were," she said. "And not everyone was successful at doing that, but there we were. We were a model to a lot of schools."

Throughout his life, Chancellor Thyreen was a source of advice not just for other presidents and community leaders; According to Dr. Thyreen, he was also a constant source of wisdom for students as well.

"He taught and was in education his whole life, and he could relate to students," Dr. Thyreen said. "He was a very unselfish, humble person, but very very analytical and always seemed to know what a person needed to hear. And he was respected throughout, you know, throughout the educational community. And the

state was a leader and they trusted him. And he wasn't one that was boastful, I think. I think people that know him and the students that knew him remember him."

According to Dr. Thyreen, his work as a mentor and a coach was something that was incredibly important to him, and he continued that work up until the end of his life.

"He loved to teach. He was a teacher and a coach, and he coached to the end. His final weeks, he had opportunities to coach several people who needed the advice," she said.

One person in particular who received significant mentoring and advice is President Lee. According to Lee, Chancellor Thyreen was a constant source of wisdom and support, particularly in the early days of Lee's tenure.

"I have other colleagues that are presidents that I discuss with as well. But that was a sort of a special relationship because, you know, he knew this place as well as I know it. I know this place as well as he knew it," he said.

--THE LEGACY--

As students settle into the new school year, the absence of the chancellor is notable for President Lee.

"You just miss someone who's become such a great friend and mentor. And, you know, that's the one thing that I probably appreciate more now than I did over the sum-

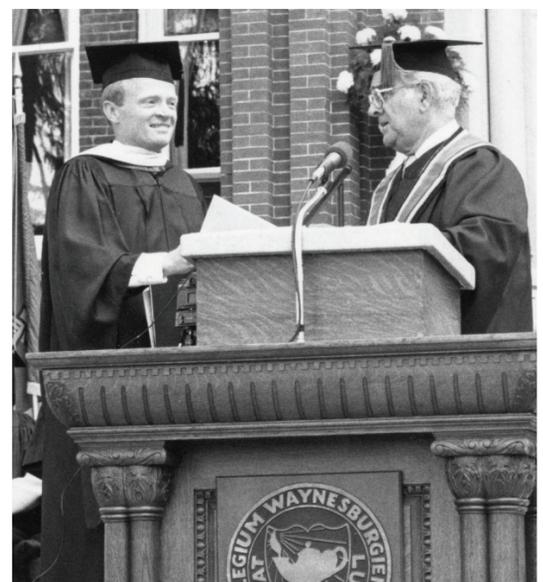


Photo courtesy of President's office

President Thyreen receives college charter