

TRIBUTE TO DEAN THOMAS J. EDWARDS

November 15, 1925 - December 13, 2015





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Friday, May 27, 2016
3 p.m.
Rosse Hall, Kenyon College

WELCOME

Tom Hoffmann '62
1958 - 1962

President Sean Decatur

REMINISCENCES

Dean Don Omahan '70
1996 - 2006

Dean Cheryl Steele
1986 - 2006

Judge Jim Carr '62 P'91
1958 - 1962

Coach Jim Steen P'01,'04
1976 - 2012

Tom Edwards Jr.

MUSIC

"Kokosing Farewell"
Sung by the Kokosingers

Peeling of the bells

RECEPTION TO FOLLOW IN RANSOM LAWN TENT

The Edwards Family—Gloria, son Tom Jr. and spouse Nancy Hunter, daughter Nancy and spouse John Maruszczak, daughter Anne, and granddaughter Laura Maruszczak—thank you for your kind thoughts and for being with them today and express their gratitude to the participants in this tribute.



THOMAS J. EDWARDS

Kenyon legend Thomas J. Edwards, head swimming coach from 1954 to 1964 and dean of students from 1957 to 1990, died Sunday, Dec. 13, 2015. He was 90 and a Gambier resident.

“Tom had an enormous impact on Kenyon and many generations of the College’s students,” President Sean Decatur said. “His close attention and concern for students set a tone for Kenyon that we aim to sustain today. I am deeply honored to have known him personally. He will be missed. Our thoughts are with Gloria and their family.”

Born Nov. 15, 1925, in Altoona, Pennsylvania, Tom grew up in York, Pennsylvania. He earned his undergraduate degree in 1948 at Springfield College and a master’s in 1953 at the University of Toledo.

Arriving at Kenyon in 1954 as head swimming coach, Tom later took on coaching duties for tennis, soccer and golf as well. He led the swimmers to 10 conference championships.

“When I first met Tom in the fall of 1958, I thought he was much, much older than I was,” said Tom Hoffmann ’62, a Lords swimmer and a 2002 inductee into the Kenyon Athletic Association Hall of Fame. “That age difference narrowed considerably over the years, as Tom became my friend. He was a great coach, a great dean and a great family man. Kenyon was the love of his life, along with his family. He was a wonderful mentor not just to his swimmers but to students in general.”

In 1957, Tom was named dean of students, a post he held for 33 years until his retirement in 1990. During the brief life of the Coordinate College for Women, from 1969 to 1972, Edwards was officially known as the dean of Kenyon College and Doris Crozier was the dean of the Coordinate College. Tom played a key role for the College during many crucial periods but none was more important than his work in crafting a fully coeducational Kenyon.

Perhaps the only time Tom lost an argument of any consequence during his tenure as dean was May 13, 1968. On that date, the faculty debated the physical-education requirement, with Tom offering a statement in favor of keeping it and Professor Richard Hettlinger putting forth the reasons for ending it. The requirement was abolished by a vote of 31 to 24.

“Tom was so many things to so many people,” said Don Omahan ’70, a one-time member of Tom’s staff and a successor to him as dean of students. “To us, he was the dean of students; to his colleagues from around the country, he was the dean of deans.

“To those of us who had the joy and honor of working with Tom, he was not just our supervisor but also our colleague, mentor, advisor and, moreover, our friend. So much of what the College is today has its roots in what Tom brought to and nurtured at the College during the last half of the previous century,” Omahan said. “He will be dearly missed.”

Jack Au ’73, a former trustee of the College, said, “I cannot think of anyone else who has made such a lasting impression on the College’s students over the course of multiple generations. Tom was enthusiastic about all things Kenyon. He was a gentle, fair and compassionate dean who understood the challenges inherent in becoming young adults. His wisdom will reside forever in the hearts of all those who knew him.”

Tom was recognized for his work by his peers, the College and alumni. In 1985, the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators gave him its top service award, the Scott Goodnight Award for Outstanding Performance as a Dean. In 1990, the College granted him the William A. Long Memorial Award, and in 1997, the alumni gave him the Greenslade Award. In 1991, he became the first administrator to be inducted into the Kenyon Athletic Association Hall of Fame. That same year, the College first awarded the Thomas J. Edwards Scholarship, created with an endowed fund established by alumni on the occasion of the dean’s retirement.

In recent years, Joseph Adkins III '63 has informally spearheaded fundraising for the scholarship, tripling the size of the fund. "Working on raising monies for the Thomas J. Edwards Scholarship Fund has been one of the most rewarding things I have ever done in my life," said Adkins. "He meant so much to so many." Adkins described Tom as stern, but fair. "He gave guys ... second chances."

At his final Commencement as dean in 1990, Tom was awarded an honorary doctorate of laws. The citation, by Perry C. Lentz '64, now professor emeritus of English, read, in part, "Villager and sportsman, coach of swimming and founder of dynasties, dean of students and defender of the College, witness to its history and keeper of its secrets: at no graduation in Kenyon's history has a man receiving an honorary degree known as much about the inner life of this institution, as much about the lives of the students spread before him, and even — we suspect — about those of the faculty assembled behind."

That Writer-in-Residence P.F. Kluge '64 called Edwards the "George Smiley of Gambier" is testimony to Edwards' skill as a "keeper of secrets."

"Tom Edwards was, simply, a Kenyon legend," said Cheryl Steele, who served as associate dean under Tom for many years. "Tom was an educator at heart and Kenyon was at the center of his passion. I was very fortunate to have been hired by and worked with Tom — and to have continued to have a deep friendship and respect for him in the years since then. I learned so much about life and work from Tom and carry that with me always, as I know many others do. What a life well-lived that we can all hope to achieve."

Vice President for Student Affairs Meredith Harper Bonham '92 echoed Steele's sentiments. "Tom Edwards is legendary for his care and compassion, and for maintaining a certain level of standards and expectations," she said. "For me and my colleagues in student affairs, Tom set a high bar for keeping students at the center of everything we do at Kenyon."

In 2002, Tom was given the Burchell H. Rowe award, presented to individuals each year who, by giving of themselves, have made significant contributions to Kenyon College athletics. In presenting the award, fabled former Kenyon swimming coach Jim Steen said, "Tom was a keen observer of the human condition as it related to athletic performance. He understood the art, and he understood the science of what it took to excel on the playing field."

"As dean of students, Tom's contribution to the athletic picture at Kenyon extended over a much broader palette. His public tone in promoting sport on campus during his tenure as dean of students was always tempered, always mindful of academic priorities, never promising too much."

Despite the heavy demands on his time on campus, Tom was involved in the larger Knox County community. He was especially active in the YMCA of Mount Vernon, serving for many years on its board of directors.

On Aug. 25, 2009, the building at 100 Gaskin Ave. in Gambier was named Edwards House in his honor. Beginning in the early 1970s, during Edwards' tenure, and until the summer of 2009, the building served as the headquarters of the Student Affairs Division, housing the dean's office and those of many of the dean's associates. Since 2009, it has been the home of the registrar's office and the academic-advising staff.

Tom is survived by his wife of 68 years, Gloria Reiss Edwards; son, Thomas J. Edwards Jr. of Athens, Georgia; two daughters Nancy Edwards, of Fort Worth, Texas, and Anne Edwards, of Charleston, South Carolina; and a granddaughter, Laura Maruszczak.

Memorial contributions may be made to the Thomas J. Edwards Scholarship Fund, in care of the Office of Development, 105 Chase Ave., Kenyon College, Gambier, Ohio, 43022-9623.

—Tom Stamp '73