

A Family Connection

Family is important to Harold Deets. Visit him in his east Wichita home and he'll show off the family pictures on the refrigerator and mantle—pictures of brides and grooms, of gap-toothed kids, nieces and great-nephews and great-nieces in various stages of life.

Given enough prompting, this quiet gentleman will talk about the Beech Aircraft Corporation, where he was a “family” member for more than 45 years. (At one point very early in his career, Harold was a temporary driver for Walter and Olive Ann Beech, before moving up the rungs of Beech’s administrative ladder.)

Or he could talk about his East Heights United Methodist Church family. Harold and his wife, Mary Ellen, were charter members of this Wichita congregation and its chancel choir, and last April marked 58 uninterrupted years of his presence in the bass section of this choir.

And for 65 years, his Southwestern College “family” has been part of his life.

It was the fall of 1939 when Harold and his mother arrived on campus to enroll him for his first classes. It was the Depression and money was scarce, so sending their

only surviving son off to Winfield was a leap of faith for Harold’s parents.

Still, he was willing to work hard. He took a campus job as a student janitor (“I remember well shoveling snow off the 77 Steps”) and cleaned the library at night, sweeping out the stacks in the basement of Stewart Field House.

As a student Harold paid \$5 per month to share a room in a private home. He didn’t have a car, but that wasn’t unusual; students rarely had cars on campus at that time. To communicate with his parents he rode his bicycle through Winfield

to the Santa Fe train station on the west edge of town—a letter mailed by evening could make it to Garfield the next day.

And during that first year, the most important moment in his life took place: “I met the love of my life.” Mary Ellen Meador had grown up near Harold in Larned, but the two didn’t meet until both were Southwestern freshmen. He was immediately smitten with the red-haired co-ed who sang soprano; they sang together in the A Cappella Choir under the direction of Professor Levi Dees and their

marriage would last 62 years until her death in 2002.

After two years at Southwestern, though, the financial burden of being a student became an impossible load. War was looming, and Harold left Southwestern to enter a national defense training program. In September of 1941 he was hired at Beech Aircraft Corporation at a sheet metal worker.

It wasn’t long, though, before Harold’s abilities began to show. He accepted a position in the accounting division, and became supervisor of all accounts payable operations. In 1950 he transferred to the materiel division and progressed through a series of supervisory responsibilities until 1972 when he was elected vice president, materiel. (One of his responsibilities included purchasing for the Apollo space program.)

Mary Ellen also was working for Beech, eventually as executive assistant to president Frank Hedrick.

“We were a very compatible couple,” Harold says of their marriage. “We both came from



good, solid, church-going families, and we supported each other.”

Few couples can register as many years of unbroken service to a company—Harold logged 45 years, Mary Ellen 37.

During all those years, they never forgot the “family” that brought them together—Southwestern College. Harold and Mary Ellen have been generous donors to the college for decades. As honorary trustees, they encouraged others to give through their leadership.

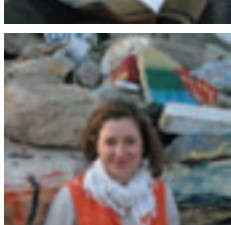
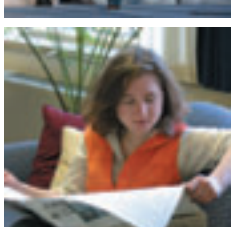
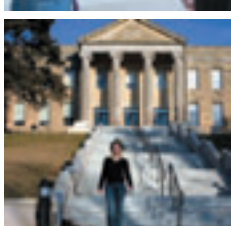
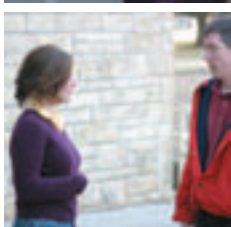
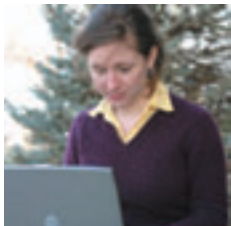
Perhaps this relationship is best embodied by the Deets Lobby, where science students gather between classes.

It’s located in the Beech Science Center, named for another family in Harold Deets’ life.

we supported each other

Syllabus: Belarussian Student Finds Haven at SC

For a young woman, Kyseniya Kochevanova understands the abuse of political power all too well.



“Belarus is a country where people disappear,” Kyseniya says.

And as Kyseniya and nearly 1,000 other students from the European Humanities University (EHU) in Minsk discovered, institutions in Belarus vanish, too.

Today, Kyseniya is preparing for graduation from Southwestern College. But in the summer of 2004, she was in educational limbo.

Recognized as a modern, American-style private university in the heart of a dictatorship government, the EHU was founded in 1993 in the wake of the collapse of the Soviet Union. But political strongman and Belarussian president Alexander Lukashenko was determined that this tribute to ideological interchange be closed.

Final exams for the EHU wrapped up in late July. On Aug. 5, the Belarussian government repealed the lease on the school’s gymnasium, claiming it was needed for political use. The

next day, the school’s charter was revoked, citing a lack of adequate facilities.

In two days, the work of 11 years was destroyed and 1,000 students were without an educational home.

Kyseniya was one of 42 EHU students in the United States on various programs when she heard of her school’s unexpected end. A year from the completion of her degree in conceptual design, Kyseniya was alone in Ogden, Utah, unsure of the direction her life was about to take.

Officials from the American Councils for International Education sent out a plea for colleges willing to host the students in the United States. SC president Dick Merriman responded with an invitation for a student to attend Southwestern. From among 81 colleges that answered the plea for help, Southwestern was one of the 13 schools selected.

Southwestern’s link to the university runs deeper than most. Natayla Michalov ’00, the daughter of EHU’s former rector, graduated from Southwestern. And David Swartz ’64, former U.S. ambassador to Belarus, is an SC grad.

So, after a three-day Greyhound bus trip to Canada to obtain a new visa, Kyseniya became a Moundbuilder.

The transition hasn’t always been easy. Gone are the lofty skylines of her European home, and as a vegetarian, Kyseniya misses the ready availability of fresh fruits and vegetables. She also misses the cultural and artistic events Minsk offered.

Still, Kyseniya finds pleasure in Kansas, including what she describes as the “freak weather.”

“In Belarus we have four seasons. Here it’s fall one day and spring the next,” Kyseniya said. “There are 100 seasons here.”

And rolling out of bed in Cole Hall and climbing the tree-dotted hill to class in the Christy Administration building is a much shorter

commute than a 40-minute public transport trip through the streets of Minsk.

Now, in her second semester, she feels more at home. Through a newly-developed international movie night, Kyseniya is finding ways to share her passions with the SC community by showing a different international film each week.

When the school year ends in May, Kyseniya will return to Belarus and to her life there. She plans to find a job in design, but knows that her life will be affected by her choices.

“A former professor told my friend’s mother that the students who stayed in America will never attend a state institution in Belarus,” said Kyseniya.

Unlike many of her EHU peers at other institutions in the United States, Kyseniya will return to Belarus with her degree.

“Everything looks very sad back at home, but I want to go there,” Kyseniya says simply. “Belarus is a dangerous place, but when you love something, you accept it.”



Story by Christy Hopkins '05 ~ Photos by Shan Szetho '05