

SIUE's Werner a pillar of the community



Kay Werner.

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Segue/Logan Cameron | On this week's segment of Segue, Southern Illinois University Edwardsville Interim Chancellor Stephen Hansen, PhD, is joined by Kay Werner, retired manager of information technology at SIUE's East St. Louis Center and former First Lady of SIUE.

In addition to her lifelong commitment to serving the SIUE community, Werner is also an SIUE alum, holding a specialist's degree in education administration from the School of Education, Health and Human Behavior (SEHHB). Werner also earned a bachelor's in history from the University of Missouri–Columbia and a master's from the University of Missouri–St. Louis. Having fulfilled a fruitful career of more than 30 years as an educator, manager and community service leader, Werner shares, “In these experiences, learning has been lifelong – you just keep going and going.”

Werner has been a dedicated advocate for many SIUE initiatives, both past and present. She has made contributions to many off-campus organizations such as Dress for Success, River Bluffs Council of Girl Scouts, Board of Trustees of the Children's Museum, Anderson Hospital and the Strategic Committee for the SEHHB. Werner is widely recognized as one of the founding members of SIUE's Meridian Society, a women's philanthropic organization focused on community service, integration and involvement. In recognition for her tireless efforts, Werner was presented with SIUE's Distinguished Service Award in 2015.

Discussion begins with Werner explaining her pursuance in academia and at SIUE, specifically. She explains that a career in teaching after completing her undergraduate studies was a mere accident, as her original plan was to pursue a career in law. She adds, “I found a great love for teaching and interacting with high school kids. I woke up one day and said to myself, ‘This is where I'm supposed to be.’”

Werner's path to joining SIUE was almost inevitable as her husband is former SIUE Chancellor David Werner, who served the SIUE community in multiple capacities for 36 years. Kay shares that her husband has a love and affection for this institution.

“He has often said that he planned for us to come here and move onto a better place someday,” she describes. “One day, he had the epiphany that we were at that ‘better place.’”

Though she could not join faculty due to nepotism via her husband's appointment at the University, Werner had a deep desire to stay involved with the campus community. As a result, she combined her love for teaching and technology to enhance information technology services at the University's East St. Louis Center.

“That was a great job which I loved,” she shares. “I felt that I truly made a contribution to the staff and to the institution, while working alongside a great team.”

As First Lady of the University, Werner shares that many great opportunities arose to make a large impact on both her community and the SIU System. While many community involvement experiences are shared, Werner specifically addresses her involvement as chair of the “A Book in Every Home” project.

An initiative, which began at the Carbondale campus under former SIUC First Lady Beverley Sanders before changing hands to the Edwardsville campus, the project seeks to provide literature to young students throughout

the counties of Madison and St. Clair. In 2015, the project distributed more than 100,000 books to homes, schools and libraries across the Metro East region.

“We have partnered with the St. Louis Blues, the (former) St. Louis Rams, the National Honor Society, the Girl Scouts of America, the SIUE Lovejoy Library and many others,” Werner says. “The program just keeps growing, and it has been absolutely wonderful.”

Werner continues by describing the community impacts made by the SIUE Meridian Society. An organization currently comprised of more than 65 women, Werner shares that the organization has donated approximately \$250,000 over the last 10 years to assist various collaborative projects between the University and community. Further, the Society established an endowment at SIUE two years ago with high hopes to rapidly grow the program.

Werner shares what the Distinguished Service Award meant to her. “That was a thrill and a real surprise,” she says. “I know of other people who have received the Award, and I say to myself, ‘Wow ... I’m in their company now.’ It was flattering, and I’m extremely grateful.”

A goal she made for herself during her undergraduate studies at the University of Missouri–Columbia, Werner shares her drive to “every day, meet someone new.”

“It was enlightening,” adds. “I met people from all over the world, and I made a lot of great friends that way.”

Hansen concurs by sharing, “These characteristics represent your openness to the world and your passion for organizations. Your passion explains your success as a leader in the SIUE community and in the GlenEd area, and can serve as an example for all of us. I have always been inspired by your openness and passion, which are attractive and major keys to success.”

They conclude with Werner’s revelation of a special talent in the laundry room. While she takes pride in her clothes washing skills, Hansen counters her talent by adding, “You’re way too modest – your talent is making people smile, and making great contributions to society and your community.”

Tune in to WSIE 88.7 FM every Sunday at 9 a.m. as weekly guests discuss issues on SIUE’s campus.

By Logan Cameron, SIUE Marketing and Communications