

Today

UNCW

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the university.*

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Plyler steps down as dean to resume teaching and research

In his 23 years with Wilmington College and The University of North Carolina at Wilmington, Dr. Daniel Belk Plyler has touched the lives of many students, faculty, and staff. In January of this year, he announced his decision to step down on July 31, 1989, as dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, a post he has held since 1979, when the position was created.

Because of his long tenure as dean, *UNCW Today* thought that you might enjoy hearing in his own words why he decided to make this change, how he measures his achievements, and what he plans for the future. Mimi Cunningham interviewed Plyler for *UNCW Today*.

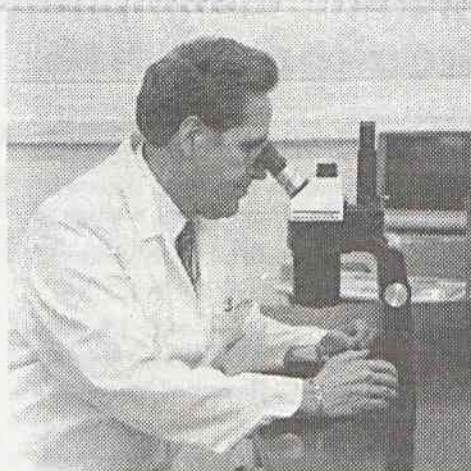


Plyler poses with his collection of Irish Setter figurines.

Why did you make the decision to step down at this time? Upon accepting the position of dean, I made a commitment to myself to reserve the last several years of my career for teaching and research. When I went into administration, I left hanging some important ques-

tions in my research. Now I want to get back to those questions. I am also eager now to get back into teaching. Until 1984, I maintained some instructional activities along with my administrative responsibilities, but I eventually had to give them up.

What were you teaching? A course in genetics and human affairs. It's a non-laboratory course that attracts students from virtually all areas - philosophy and religion, psychology, education, nursing, medical technology, and of course biology. With that kind of class composition, one could do lots of interesting things that can't be done effectively when work-



In the laboratory, Plyler examines Cakile under the microscope.

ing with students who are all majoring in the same discipline.

Is this what you want to get back into? I want to do some of that, but my primary interests are in botany and plant physiology. One of the research interests I will pursue deals with developmental phenomena of a plant that has a worldwide distribution, but grows only along the sea coasts; in fact, it grows only on the ocean side of sand dunes. It's a flowering plant with the common name of sea rocket and scientific name of Cakile.

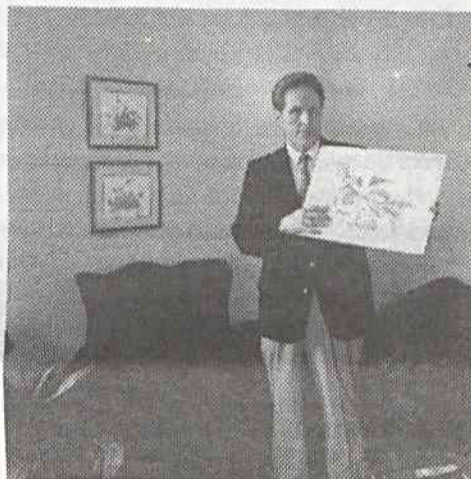
Does it look like a cactus? It has some structural features like a cactus. It's found all along North Carolina's barrier islands. Some very interesting problems with this plant range from factors relating to its distribution throughout the world to those concerning its restriction to a very specific habitat. As a plant that grows on the dunes, it may have some importance with regard to beach stabilization, but of primary interest to me is the fact that it literally thrives in what would be a very hostile environment for most other plants.

Have you been interested in the Cakile all along? I have been interested in Cakile as an unusual plant for a long time, but I have not conducted research on it before now. Cakile belongs to the same family as mustard greens and turnips. Its seeds apparently contain a germination inhibitor that prevents germination until conditions for growth are optimal. This is a phenomena that is more characteristic of desert plants than most other kinds. The biological significance here is that the amount of water required to leach out the inhibitor is also the amount needed to

sustain growth once the seed germinates. It's a survival mechanism. I am interested in pursuing a possible link between this phenomena and the plant's restriction to a saline environment.

You have been at UNCW, or Wilmington College, since 1966. And this place has changed quite a bit. It's changed considerably. When I came down in '65 for an interview, the campus consisted of three buildings -- James Hall, Alderman, and Hoggard. Kenan Hall was in the final stages of completion as was Hanover Hall -- that was it. The biology department which now has a faculty of 28, had only 5, and one of them was on leave at that time. So when I came, I was the fifth person in biology.

At that time, the first floor of Hoggard Hall housed the departments of biology, chemistry, physics, and nursing. Biology had one lecture room, and one general laboratory. We literally taught from sunup until late at night. Laboratory sessions were scheduled back to back from 7 in the morning until 10 p.m. This was necessary because we didn't have any-



Plyler, a scholar of plant physiology, exhibits one of his Sally Middleton wildflower prints.

where else to teach. We had fewer than 1,000 students then and no more than 70 faculty members campus-wide, but space availability was a greater problem then than now.

What positions have you held here? I first came here as associate professor of biology, and later I became chairman of the biology department. A short time later, I assumed an additional responsibility as the first director of the marine science program. My first full-time administrative position was that of assistant

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Champion McDowell Davis establishes scholarship fund

Academically superior students attending UNCW have gained increased scholarship opportunities, thanks to the generosity of the Champion McDowell Davis Charitable Foundation.

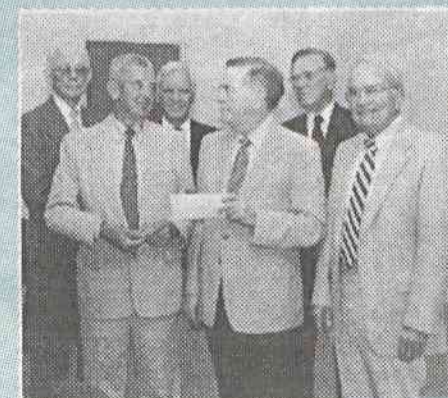
The Foundation's board of directors presented a check for \$100,000 to Chancellor William H. Wagoner May 17. The money will be used to establish the Champion McDowell Davis Scholarship Fund. This fund represents the third largest scholarship endowment program currently in place at UNCW.

In addition to the base funds for the endowment, the directors also presented the chancellor a second check for \$10,000. This money will provide scholarships for fall semester '89, while waiting one year for earnings to accrue on the base fund.

The scholarship fund will provide full tuition and fee scholarships, plus a stipend, based on academic excellence and merit. Recipients, to be known as Champion McDowell Davis Scholars, may choose any field of study offered by UNCW. In awarding the scholarships, preference will be given to North Carolina residents.

Michael D. Brown, president of the Davis Charitable Foundation, presented the check to Chancellor Wagoner. Brown commented that a scholarship program to award high achievers at UNCW was a "worthy charity, one that sets an example to others, and provides an education for our youth." He noted that Davis would have been especially proud to support such a scholarship because it's believed he did not finish high school.

(please see page 5)



Members of the Champion McDowell Davis Charitable Foundation present the scholarship endowment check to Chancellor William H. Wagoner. They are, from left: Dr. R.T. Sinclair; Michael C. Brown, chairman; John R. Murchison; Wagoner; Emsley A. Laney; and Dr. John B. Codrington. Not pictured, Cyrus D. Hogue Jr. and Peter B. Ruffin.