

THE DECREE

since 1960 "of, by, and for the Wesleyan community."

June 1, 2016

NORTH CAROLINA WESLEYAN COLLEGE, ROCKY MOUNT, NORTH CAROLINA 27804

Michael Pratt—Alum, Coach, Instructor, Trustee, VP—Retires

Michael Pratt ('66), vice president of advancement, has retired from Wesleyan 54 years after he came to the college as a first-generation student to play basketball and study history and education.

Over the years, he has served as a coach, instructor, president of the alumni association, and trustee. In 2012, he was named to his current position, after a long career in secondary education, which culminated in his tenure as headmaster of Rocky Mount Preparatory School.

Pratt was interviewed over email in the weeks before his retirement, May 31.

Q. Why did you come to Wesleyan in the first place? We understand you were an athlete.

A. I found myself wrapped up in athletics in high school. I went to Suffolk High School (in Virginia) and being a Red Raider as an adolescent was perhaps the proudest identity one could have. I was into student government, clubs, but mostly athletics, where I played football, basketball, and baseball every year from grades 9–12. Old Dominion did not offer me a basketball scholarship and I wanted to play somewhere. Wesleyan was brand new and state-of-the-art in 1962 when I first set foot on campus. I came to play basketball and we didn't have a gym. Everett Gymnasium was just rising out of the ground in its steel structure, but Coach Scalf said that if I would come, he could promise a gymnasium in the fall of 1963.

The first Wesleyan basketball team was in 1962. We were sponsored by Joyner's Athletics, a sporting goods business in downtown Rocky Mount. We practiced at the orphanage, which is where Fountain Correctional facility is now, and played our games in the men's league of Rocky Mount at R. M. Wilson Junior High for the most part. Without hesitation, I would say that the one characteristic that all of us had on that first team was that we all simply wanted to play. The next year we had Everett Gymnasium and entered the Dixie Conference. By the end of my senior year, we won the school's first-ever conference championship. I recall that our home crowds were huge. Almost no one had an automobile, so on-campus activities were our entertainment. Aside from four years of basketball on the inaugural team, I played one year of baseball, three years of tennis, and three years of soccer on the inaugural team. I played on 11 athletic teams and was the first athlete to be awarded Most Outstanding Athlete by the college two consecutive years, 1963-64 and 1964-65. Wesleyan truly helped me satisfy my appetite for competitive athletics.

Q. Describe what the college was like back in the 1960s.

A. Wesleyan looked like a classic college campus and seemed big enough for all of us in 1962. The Georgian architecture was beautifully done. There were two dorms (Nash and Edgecombe), an infirmary (Spruill), cafeteria, student union, bookstore, and post office (Hardees), and the academic building (Braswell, Gravely, and Pearsall). The library was two large rooms connected on the second floor of Braswell along the west side. We referred to Wesleyan as the "Davidson of the East." It seemed that most of us were first-generation college students, with no idea of what going to college was like. We were dropped off by our parents and had to figure it out on our own. Socially, the college was small enough that it seemed like one large sorority and fraternity. Freshmen wore the blue and gold beanies; there was an annual field day where upper classmen challenged incoming freshmen in various field events. There was no hesitation for the men to wear ties or the women to dress up just to go to class. It was racially homogeneous. We had the best small bands of the time come to Wesleyan (e.g., Maurice Williams and the Zodiacs, The Shirelles, and Rufus Thomas). The events were held in the cafeteria after moving all of the tables. I remember students coming from East Carolina, Carolina, State and Duke to enjoy this part of the social life at the college. About 25 of us went to the Rocky Mount Armory to see James Brown perform. We sat on folded metal chairs. Everyone knew of the Retreat/Rainbow Club, the college's off-campus watering hole during the early years.

Q. In what specific ways did Wesleyan equip you for both a career and citizenship?

A. The true gifts of a liberal arts education



Michael Pratt ('66) retired from his alma mater May 31. G. Wallace photo

seem to be qualitative more than quantitative. A liberal-arts education inculcates the values associated with critical and disciplined thinking, speaking, and writing; the ability to understand different points of view; the value of diversity in all its forms; acquisition of an insatiable intellectual curiosity; and the ability to engage in civil argument and be responsible for one's own actions. These values have more meaning and value the further one is removed from its source. For me that source is North Carolina Wesleyan, supported by my further studies at Old Dominion and William and Mary. A liberal-arts education offers one an opportunity to understand the power of perspective and how it relates to truth, which is the foundation of all of my undertakings. I could go on and on about this.

I found out early on that I could compete, intellectually and pedagogically, in the academic teaching fields with those

who had graduated from UVa, William and Mary, Washington and Lee, and Princeton. I majored in history and education and, early on, remember a professor stating that if you wanted to understand the power of history, you have to learn to question everything, even if your mother says it's true. Last, to graduate at Wesleyan all of us had to pass "Sophomore Hurdles," which consisted of passing a faculty-graded essay and passing a 100-word spelling test.

My Wesleyan experiences were all-encompassing: Witnessing the "God is Dead" production by the Wesleyan Singers, getting hypnotized in a religion class and given a post-hypnotic suggestion, being exposed to Samuel Beckett when reading "Waiting for Godot" (my favorite play), taking history from Willard Gatewood, chairman of the history department who later became president of the Southern Historical Society, and Chancellor of University of Arkansas, and Gordon Finney, my academic role model for these past 49 years. Because of my time in athletics, the two greatest influences were Moe Bauer and Don Scalf. Each had a way of caring deeply about all of us as athletes and young adults.

Q. What are the biggest changes you've seen since you were a student here?

A. The diverse makeup of the student body, faculty, and staff is most noticeable. Then there are the additions to the physical plant: Field House, Taylor Center, Pearsall Library, Russell Chapel, Pearsall Welcome Center, Four Sisters Gallery, Dunn Center for the Performing Arts, the Bradley, Boddie, and Centura residence halls, Belmonte House, and Gateway. Fraternities and Sororities are new. The addition of the international students is a nice change. The power and relevance

to the college's sustainability of the ASPIRE adult degree program is immeasurable. Its success allows the college to enjoy our present stability as it moves toward a more dynamic vision of being a college of 2,000 with an admirable offering of graduate programs.

Q. You're about to celebrate your 50th anniversary as a grad. How will you observe this milestone?

A. I'll recognize that 50 years is a long time and I will absolutely remember North Carolina Wesleyan and all of the faculty, staff, administration, and students who made up the college and changed my life in ways for which I will forever be grateful. The experience was challenging and filled with many successes and a few instructive failures that forged my character and integrity, my intellectual curiosity, my insatiable appetite for reading and discussion, my often self-deprecating sense of humor, and my appreciation for the diversity of humankind. All of this has evolved to create my present value system: Do good and be kind. I will take time to reflect on how much my mother and father sacrificed to see that I was able to attend college as a first-generation student.

Q. What brought you back to NCWC as vice president of advancement, and what's your proudest accomplishment during the past four years?

A. I was in my seventh year as headmaster at Rocky Mount Prep and serving on the college's Board of Trustees. President Gray and Vel Johnson, chairman of the Board, came to visit one day and asked if I would consider returning to help the college. I was finishing my 45th year in school work and thought this would be an interesting change. I've never taken sole credit for my numerous successes, because I don't need those kinds of accolades. These successes are not mine, but ours.

Two things stand out: 1) When the trustees asked me to take over college admissions in 2013, I told them that I didn't have any idea, based on experience, about college admissions. I told our admissions team the same thing. Immediately, we would cease all practices that didn't work and consider any idea that had merit. We'd been bringing in between 215 and 235 new students annually and on August 13, 2014 at 11:15 a.m., we had in hand, all at the same time, 400 deposits. This turned out to be the largest new class in the 53-year history of the college, and it helped set a new student benchmark at 400. That is huge for the college.

2) The other hallmark would have to be the successful effort in securing the Title III federal grant for more than \$2 million. From January 6 to June 5, 2015, a group of 13 VPs, faculty and staff joined the Title III Macro-committee and 9 met once a week during that period, often talking on a conference call with our consultants, Paul Bucci PhD Associates. We were notified on September 28, 2015 that our grant had been chosen for funding. We had a perfect score of 103 and that year the cut score was

NCWC Tennis Team Upset In First Round of NCAAs

By Decree Staff

The men's tennis team was eliminated in the first round of the NCAA tournament, losing to an opponent that it had dominated just two weeks earlier.

The USA South Conference champions bowed to Washington & Lee, 5-4, on May 13 at Emory University in Atlanta, even after winning all three doubles matches, something that Coach Dustin Hale had said was a key to victory in the NCAAs. Just two weeks earlier, in a non-conference tune-up match, the Bishops had defeated the Generals, 7-2, in Lexington, Virginia.

Hale said several factors contributed to his team's first-round exit. One was an extended layoff between the conference tournament—won 8-1 by Wesleyan over Methodist—on April 17, and the first round of the NCAAs.

"It definitely hurt and there should be something done about it," he said. "It makes very little sense that our conference tournament is the first to be played in the country."

(W&L (16-9) played in its conference championship on May 8, taking the ODAC title, 5-2, over Virginia Wesleyan.)

Due to fixed travel plans, the Bishops played without two of its top players in singles, #3 J.D. Telles and #6 Henry Lam. The two freshmen returned home to El Salvador before the NCAAs. "That hurt our depth going into the tournament," Hale said.

Despite the obstacles, the first-year coach said, the team still expected to win, noting that he was satisfied with his team's preparation. "We just didn't capitalize on our opportunities. It happens," he said. "We were young this year and will have a lot more experience on our side going into next year."

The Bishops jumped to a 3-0 lead against W&L, as wins were posted by the duos of Sebastian Sikh/Peter Hviid (8-6), Mikhail Konnov/David Chang (9-8), and Ioannis Brokakis/Eduardo Ugalde (8-3).

At that point, Hale figured his team was in control. "I thought we were in great shape," he said, "because #1 (Sikh) and #2 (Brokakis) had only lost a couple of games between them the last time we played against (Washington & Lee)."

Back on April 29, Sikh had vanquished his opponent, 6-2, 6-2, while Brokakis had shut out his, 6-0, 6-0.

In Atlanta, the top two Generals were

winners, as Jordan Krasner beat Sikh, 7-5, 6-3, and Thomas Johnson bested Brokakis, 6-3, 7-5.

W&L's Perry Clements tied the match at 3-3 with a 6-1, 6-4 victory at #5, only to see Hviid bring the Bishops within one point of a win with a 6-1, 7-5 decision at #6.

With the match on the line, W&L's Joe Siami took a three-setter from Konnov with a 6-3 victory in the final set to tie the score at 4-4. The Generals' Will Bannister then went the distance with NCWC's Mark Sokolov, clinching the upset with a 7-5 win in the third.

Wesleyan (16-8 and ranked 37th at the time) is now 8-8 all-time in NCAA tournament play. It had won its previous seven NCAA first-round matches.

A day after eliminating the Bishops, unranked W&L saw its season come to an end at the hands of #1 ranked Emory, 5-0.

(Sports Information contributed to this report.)

Wesleyan Profile: 'Miss Gail' Fields

By Kelli Wynn
Decree Staff Writer

With her exuberant personality, Miss Gail Fields is well known for her daily interactions with students on campus.

"Miss Gail," as students know her, is a Christian woman who works at the main reception desk in Braswell and serves as a staff member in the Wesleyan finance department.

When her husband of 33 years, Linwood, died on October 25, 2006, Miss Gail decided to retire from her job at the time. After six years, she returned to the workforce, which is what first brought her to Wesleyan.

October 15th will mark three years that

Miss Gail has been working at the college. She first came here from a temporary agency as a fill-in at the reception desk and switchboard. After a few months, she was then asked to join the college's staff. This is one of the most memorable moments Miss Gail has experienced since she has been here, she said. In the past three years many Wesleyan students have become fond of Miss Gail and talk with her at some point during their day.



Miss Gail always has a friendly greeting for students and staff. G. Wallace photo

Timothy McDonald, a junior, always speaks to Miss Gail whenever he passes through the Braswell building.

"She's a nice lady," he said. "She always says 'hey' every morning and whenever I need assistance with anything she's always helpful."

Students appreciate everything Miss Gail has done for them. Emanuel Williams, SGA President, stated, "I love Miss Gail.

She's an inspiration to our campus. She's like the mother of all the students. Wesleyan wouldn't be the same without her."

The feeling is mutual, Miss Gail said. "They (the students) really help make my day and I hope, even in some kind of small way, I help make theirs," she said. "They're so smart and so well-mannered."

Although many students speak to her when passing her desk in the Braswell building, most do not know what she does.

"My primary job is to answer the switchboard as calls come in from the outside and inside," Miss Gail explained.

See MISS GAIL pg 2