

A handshake and a hug in the North Carolina heat

President emeritus greeted new students on move-in day

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New students stand in a lot of lines their first day on Elon University's campus — long lines for orientation packets, desk hutches and room keys snake through residential neighborhoods.

But for those moving into Danieley Neighborhood, at the end of the longest line sat the man the neighborhood was named after: President Emeritus J. Earl Danieley.

"He would just be sitting in his armchair and just cracking jokes and asking people where they're from, and then honestly making small talk just to make them feel better," said Evan Skloot '16. "And then give out some nice big hugs."

A 'way with connecting'

Skloot was an Orientation Leader in the Danieley Neighborhood his sophomore year and was then in charge of Danieley Neighborhood move-in his junior year as a Head Staff team member. In that time, he sat next to Danieley at orientation lunches and introduced the president emeritus before his annual speeches to orientation staff.

But though those lunches and speeches meant a lot to Skloot, he said nothing was more important to orientation than Danieley sitting outside in his faded red

armchair, the most important friendly face in a sea of orientation and residence life staff.

"Dr. Danieley just has this way with — I won't even say way with words, just way with connecting with anyone," he said. "He just understands. He's been here for 70 plus years. He has seen every type of student, every type of parent, of family — he gets it.

"He knows what to say, what to do to make them feel better."

Even toward the end of his life, Danieley still stuck it out — even in the steamy North Carolina August.

Jaimie Biermann, current community director in the Oaks Neighborhood, was community director for Danieley Neighborhood for the past three years. In her first year in that role, she said she was shocked that Danieley could stay outside in the heat.

"My first year it was so hot outside during move-in, and he was just smiles the entire time, shaking hands," she said.

Skloot remembers that move-in day, too. He was an orientation leader working move-in day in Danieley Neighborhood then.

"[Danieley], despite being a 90-year-old in brutally hot weather in the middle of a North Carolina summer, you could not tell," Skloot said. "You would not know that he probably was incredibly uncomfortable physically."

Skloot remembers moving into Danieley Neighborhood his first year at Elon and shaking Danieley's hand, but he has no idea when the tradition started. As far as he and Biermann remember, Danieley

has just always been there.

"It was just a thing," Biermann said. "I don't even know when it started, it was just like, 'This is a thing that always happens.' Dr. Danieley's chair is gonna be outside, it's gonna be waiting. So they'd set that up ahead of time."

Beyond move-in

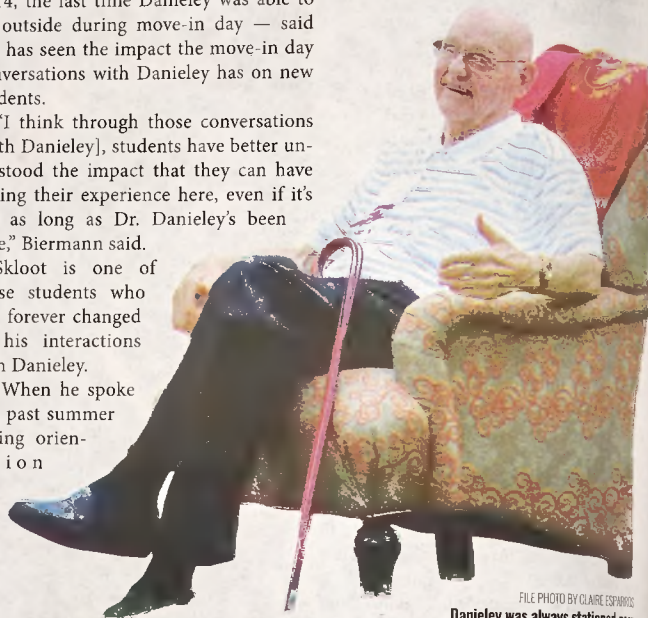
Biermann — who was still community director in Danieley Neighborhood in 2014, the last time Danieley was able to sit outside during move-in day — said she has seen the impact the move-in day conversations with Danieley has on new students.

"I think through those conversations [with Danieley], students have better understood the impact that they can have during their experience here, even if it's not as long as Dr. Danieley's been here," Biermann said.

Skloot is one of those students who was forever changed by his interactions with Danieley.

"When he spoke this past summer during orientation

leader training, that was actually the moment when I realized that I really wanted to go into higher ed administration," he said. "When he was speaking about their community and the relationships he's built and the amazing life that he's had, I realized at that moment that that was what I wanted to do."



FILE PHOTO BY CLARE ESPARDO
Danieley was always stationed near Danieley K on new student move-in day

Faye Conally matched brother J. Earl Danieley's commitment

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Faye Conally knows the ins and out of almost every Elon University building like the back of her hand. After following the footsteps of her brother President Emeritus J. Earl Danieley, Conally graduated Elon in 1961 with a degree in secretarial science.

"Options for young ladies in those days were so limited that you could be a secretary, a nurse or taking care of children," she said. "I wasn't ready to settle down, so I took to secretarial science."

The day after she received her certificate, she was hired full-time as a secretary in the registrar's office. Conally worked there until 1967 when she and her husband moved to High Point, North Carolina.

But Conally could never fully escape Elon, still attending the Elon basketball games against High Point and watching her brother from the other side of the court. She knew she would return.

"My brother was a freshman when I was born, so I had Elon in my blood for years," Conally said. "They told me when I was little, I used to cheer 'E-L-O-N.'"

The couple came back in December 1976, and Conally returned full-time to Elon, this time working as a secretary at the treasurer's office, the business office, accounting office and personnel office.

During this time she became close with many Elon employees.

"Back then we had approximately 300



Faye Conally, President Emeritus J. Earl Danieley's sister, stands in front of Elon Baseball memorabilia in 1991.

employees — faculty, staff, physical plant — there was 300," Conally said. "We all knew each other by name. It was a good experience. I enjoyed it very much."

With a staff that small, they could celebrate birthdays together with cake in a single office, and their holiday faculty/staff lunches were held in McEwen Dining Hall.

During one of the lunch-ins, Conally was encouraged to sit on Danieley's lap for a photo when he was dressed like Santa Claus. She still has the picture.

Though sometimes she stayed across the hall from Danieley, he treated her equally and just as another employee. She often didn't see him unless they passed each other in the hallway.

"I worked at the office across the hall,

but he treated me no differently than anyone else," Conally said. "I was just one of the secretaries."

She watched her brother lead the school, sometimes needing to be strict but still beloved by returning alumni and students in years to come.

"He enforced rules," Conally said. "He was good. But he has very high values and moved in and sought to it, even if he had to send a student home for a whole year, and some of them would come back."

Conally left again in 1996, which she originally thought was her last.

"Shortly after I left, I got a call, 'Could you fill in for someone?' And I said, 'Well, I hadn't thought about this, I guess I could,'" Conally said. "So I filled in."

For the next 10 years, Conally bounced around as a temporary part-time employee, filling in as a secretary to various offices, including admissions, advising, health services and the president's office.

In January 2006, Conally switched again to a part-time position working Elon's switchboard in the afternoon while previ-

ously full-time switchboard operator Dottie Bar would work mornings.

Working at the Technology Service Desk, she would be the contact to transfer employees into communications with other offices on campus. Often she would be the first contact that people calling in made with university, so she needed to make a good impression.

Calls ranged from driving directions to general questions about the university. But some calls were more quirky than others.

"There's lots of interesting, fun, weird calls from time to time," Conally said. "I should have made notes — unbelievable kinds of questions we've received on switchboard. Every day was different. You never knew what people were going to be asking."

Michelle Woods, manager of the Technology Service Desk, said it was a pleasure working with Conally and that she set high standards for future switchboard operators to come by encouraging everyone to be polite, professional, use proper grammar and provide excellent assistance.

Her co-workers also loved her homemade brownies.

"There were many times that Faye would go above and beyond to assist a faculty or staff member, student, parent or an outside community member," Woods said. "Faye is very polite, friendly and she always takes the time to ask you how you are doing."

Conally retired from Elon for good in January 2016, but employees at the Technology Service Desk had her promise to visit every couple of weeks. She still stops by to check on the plants.

She also stays connected with the school by attending sporting events, especially the basketball games.

"It's a wonderful school," Conally said. "I'm so proud of it. Those of us who attended college are really proud it's a university. I never dreamed it would grow like this."