



## NEWS RELEASE

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### USI HONORS LEADERS IN FIRST ANNUAL FOUNDER'S DAY

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When the University of Southern Indiana initiated a Founder's Day ceremony in September 1992, at age 27, the hosts -- the Staff Council and Faculty Senate -- honored 11 people who had been with the University for a least 25 years.

The event was the more distinctive because the group included Dr. David L. Rice, president of the University, and his wife, Betty J. Rice (see separate story). The Rices had been USI's only first family, piloting a course that has turned a branch campus of Indiana State University, opened in 1965 with 412 students, into a separate state university with a 1992 fall enrollment of 7,430. USI's enrollment has increased annually, even during the years when other schools were seeing declines.

The honorees also included two vice presidents, Dr. Donald D. Bennett, Student Life, and Byron C. Wright, Business Affairs; the dean of the School of Liberal Arts, Dr. James R. Blevins; John L. Deem, registrar; and five other faculty members -- Dr. Rolla M. Dyer, chemistry; Dr. Yen-Tzu Fu, mathematics; Dr. Donald E. Pitzer, history; Mary A. Schroeder, communications; and Eric L. vonFuhrmann, English.

Rice brought Wright with him from Ball State University and persuaded Bennett to leave the parent ISU staff the next year and join in the quest to provide higher education in southern Indiana. They joined a fledgling faculty in an abandoned Evansville elementary school and stayed to help realize what everyone acknowledged as Dr. Rice's vision -- a state university that one day will provide a higher education for 10,000 students. USI was moved in 1969 to a 300-acre campus in the midst of the 1,100-acre Mid-America University Center, located between Evansville and Mt. Vernon. The University has structures valued at more than \$33 million and plans to break ground shortly on a \$14.5-million Health Professions Building. It will house USI's School of Nursing and Health Professions and the Evansville Center-Indiana University School of Medicine, now divided between the USI and University of Evansville campuses.

The Rices will be honored again on October 2, when the USI Board of Trustees, the USI Foundation, and the USI Alumni Association co-host a reception for them at the Evansville Museum of Arts and Science.

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**David L. Rice, Ph.D.**  
**President, University of Southern Indiana**

Although there have been dramatic changes in public higher education in southwestern Indiana, little has changed about David Rice, the gentleman who came to Evansville in 1967 to develop public higher educational opportunities. He remains focused on the important issues...serving students well, improving the educational attainment level of southern Indiana, positively impacting economic and workforce development, and bringing innovative faculty together with the communities of southern Indiana.

As the first dean of the newly-established Evansville campus, it did not take Dr. Rice long to sketch out his plan for extending education to previously unserved Hoosiers. On his first anniversary in office in 1968, he spoke of the opportunity to chart a fresh course using new concepts of education. And those who have observed his performance know that he has been charting new courses for public higher education ever since.

Dr. Rice brought his family to Evansville intending to put down roots. They had moved many times as he moved from teaching junior high school in Wallace, Indiana, while pursuing his advanced degrees at Purdue University, to faculty and administrative positions for Ball State University, including a stint in Washington, D.C., as research coordinator in the Bureau of Research of the U.S. Office of Education. While he was on leave from Ball State in 1966, he served as vice president with the Cooperative Education Research Laboratory in Indianapolis, and learned of the new educational venture in Evansville in need of administrative leadership.

Rice regards that opportunity as the "chance of a lifetime," explaining there were not that many institutions of public higher education in the United States...probably less than 3,000. Plus, he says, "Evansville had a reputation as a community on the move. Its community leaders were doing things and creating opportunities."

He also remembers promising his children, Mike and Denise, some geographical stability during their teenage years. "I knew that guiding this campus was a setting that would change every few years, that there would be a new set of opportunities from time to time. That was appealing."

And there have been many new opportunities. The institution evolved from limited course offerings culminating only in an associate degree to a baccalaureate and then master's level institution. It also evolved from a regional campus housed in a condemned elementary school to a separate state university occupying contemporary classroom facilities on a beautiful master-planned expanse of land. Today, the University is known for its dedicated teaching faculty who have reached into southern Indiana to share their expertise.

When David Rice is asked how those things happened, his explanation is based in the concepts of education he referred to in 1968. "In education and in curriculum development, you define the nature of society in general, then the nature of the closer society...the community, and then shape the curricula to fit into that perspective. Today we call that environmental scanning. You work with what you have."  
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What David Rice had to work with in 1967 was a dedicated group of community leaders who had inspired the entire community to support public higher education. "Byron (Wright) and I have commented often how fortunate we have been to work with some of the keenest minds in Indiana. The people who organized Southern Indiana Higher Education, Inc., (SIHE) and who have worked to sustain this educational venture have been excellent mentors in terms of planning and problem solving."

One of those, former Mayor Frank McDonald, Sr., remembers when David Rice was introduced to Evansville and credits his kindness to people and his wisdom for the successful years of his administration. "First of all, David Rice is a fine human being, a gentleman in the full sense of the word. With his wisdom, he developed the school from infancy to the respected University it is today. He was the right person at the right time to develop higher education in southern Indiana."

Another leader, Rolland Eckels, retired public affairs director of Mead Johnson Company, was an organizer of the SIHE fund drive and continues on the SIHE board today. He agrees with Mayor McDonald. "David Rice is a classic example of the right person in the right place at the right time. He came in 1967 and very effectively acted as a shepherd to the embryonic ISUE, guiding with a firm but kindly hand during the early and struggling days at Centennial School."

Eckels thinks Dr. Rice's major achievement has been building bridges to the community. "David has become a key member and a leader in the Tri-State, serving in a major way in virtually every civic endeavor. He is perceptive, highly intelligent, an achiever, and a motivator, but with all that, he is modest and is well regarded by all."

The teamwork Dr. Rice encountered in 1967 and has enjoyed for 25 years has been especially satisfying. "It has been rewarding to see such a large community coalesce to achieve a goal they discern as necessary." He ticks off benchmarks he attributes to teamwork: "...meeting accreditation, the Library book drive led by the Jaycees, seeing ground broken on the new campus and adding each building, working to attract the finest professors possible, watching the city grow out to the campus, achieving separate state university status, in all to see the city, county, and state governments work together to make the Mid-America University Center a reality."

Dr. Daniel A. Miller, professor emeritus of history who served for many years as chairman of the Social Science Division, was one of the first faculty members hired at the campus. He recalls how Dr. Rice united and organized the young faculty. "His vigorous no-nonsense approach included clear-cut directions. Dr. Rice didn't waste words and he didn't tolerate what he called negative reactions. More often than not, he signaled his moods by a characteristic crinkling of the face -- usually into a smile. His leadership got ISUE by the critical years of 1967-69 when nearly all the basic guidelines for USI were established. Without his guidance during this time, our present unparalleled expansion might not have taken place," says Dr. Miller.

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When Dr. Rice reflects on those first critical years of development, he recalls the late Governor Roger Branigin's advice to SIHE and Dr. Alan Rankin, then president of Indiana State University: "This (establishing public higher education in Evansville) is a reasonable goal. It needs to take place."

And from then on, Dr. Rice says the institution was in a state of "becoming." "That is a very vibrant notion. It unleashes additional energies to move forward. From its beginning in 1965 to its establishment as USI in 1985, the institution was becoming, and there was an almost compelling urge to become better. One of the worst things we could have done was to restrain its development. It was our job to continue to assess conditions and remove constraints."

Rice says one of the traits of leadership he values is establishing the conditions which are right to make things happen, then getting out of the way so people can do their jobs, and ensure progress. Dr. Don Pitzer, professor and chairman of history and director of the Center for Communal Studies, remembers that trait. He came to then-ISUE just a month before Dr. Rice. It was not long after that that Dr. Rice, urged by *Evansville Press* reporter Edna Folz, introduced Dr. Pitzer to nearby New Harmony and Owenite descendants Helen Elliott, her brother John and his wife Josephine. That was the beginning of Dr. Pitzer's work, now of international scope, in studying communal societies. "Dr. Rice has been highly aware of regional resources, and he has been willing to be involved personally."

Dr. Pitzer also recalls a conversation he had with Dr. Rice in the lobby of the newly-opened Administration Building in 1969, during which the young dean said to him, "You know, most campuses are noted for something." He cited examples of other universities' academic programs and professors who built them, and continued, "I would like for this University to look to what it can be noted for."

In the 25 years that Dr. Pitzer has been building national and international regard for the Communal Studies Center, he says he has thought back to that moment many times. "David Rice is a visionary. He has moved the University in directions which are rooted very deeply in resources which are here, uniquely here, and helped build programs on those resources which have national and international impact."

Dean of Liberal Arts James Blevins, another of the University's early professors, says Dr. Rice "challenged all of us to be concerned with the cultural and historical aspects of southern Indiana. Today, in addition to Dr. Pitzer's Communal Studies program, the University manages Historic New Harmony and the Lincoln outdoor dramas with the Indiana Department of Natural Resources, is the catalyst for the Historic Southern Indiana organization, and has successfully created in New Harmony Theatre the only Actors' Equity theatre company in Indiana outside of Indianapolis. There is not another institution which takes this kind of responsibility seriously. It is one of the institutional traits that I am most proud of," he says.

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It has taken patience to achieve USI's successes. Some of the benchmarks of Rice's administration have been long in coming and sometimes frustrating. These do not seem to have taken their toll on Dr. Rice, who said that as a child in the depression, he watched WPA workers stay at the job in spite of inadequate resources and adverse working conditions. "What I learned was to focus on achievements and not let the disappointments keep you from working."

Dr. John J Pruis, former president of Ball State University who chaired the Board of Incorporators for an Independent State University in Southwestern Indiana, says Dr. Rice's ability to remain focused on positive goals sets him apart from others. "He remembers the important. He does not squander his energy on the unimportant or the inconsequential. He is a man of great perspective, tenacious; an altogether very good man who has been aided admirably by his wife Betty, his closest partner in USI work."

Someone who has watched Dr. Rice from a national perspective since the years he was with the U.S. Department of Education is Dr. Allen Ostar, for many years the president of American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU). He says Dr. Rice's skill in guiding the University of Southern Indiana from a branch campus to a comprehensive university is nothing short of remarkable.

"When he went there, the people in that part of the state had a very limited choice of programs. Under his leadership, the programs and the budget have expanded and the quality of the institution has increased, and I think that shows a rather remarkable degree of leadership. In his own quiet way, David Rice has been one of the most effective presidents in public higher education in the past 25 years," he asserts.

Dr. Ostar also said Dr. Rice's dedication to fundamental principles over the past 25 years has benefitted the people of southern Indiana. "Back in those (early) days, many educational leaders were talking about the concepts of accessibility, low tuition, and a strong commitment to responsibility for public service. Over the years, I have seen an erosion of commitment to those ideals. But not in the case of Dr. Rice. He has been steadfast in his commitment to those ideals despite changes in the economy," says Dr. Ostar.

In 1970, a news article quoted Dr. Rice, "...every citizen who desires an education, who is capable of attaining an education, and who is willing to achieve an education shall have the opportunity to do so." Those words echo through the pages of the University's history, which will remember the institution's first president as one of only a handful of contemporary American college presidents with a 25-year tenure at the same institution.

It also will remember him the way Indiana State University President Alan Rankin described him at the campus dedication in 1970. He said Dr. Rice "has brought a sense of coherence and unity to the campus." That, indeed, is quite a legacy.