

Don Chapin, Medallion Service Award Recipient

by Suzanne B. Bopp
Alumnews Editor

Friends say Don Chapin's commitment to UW is beyond question, and if time and work given in service are any measure, that is the truth.

Chapin's parents moved to Casper from St. Louis, Mo., when he was a year old, and he has remained in Casper all his life, with brief exceptions for school. For his undergraduate degree, he chose the University of Nebraska and studied accounting.

"My father was an accountant and I thought I would be one too," Chapin says. But accounting didn't seem to be a good fit for him. "It was as though I could hit all the right notes but couldn't make any music," he says, laughing.

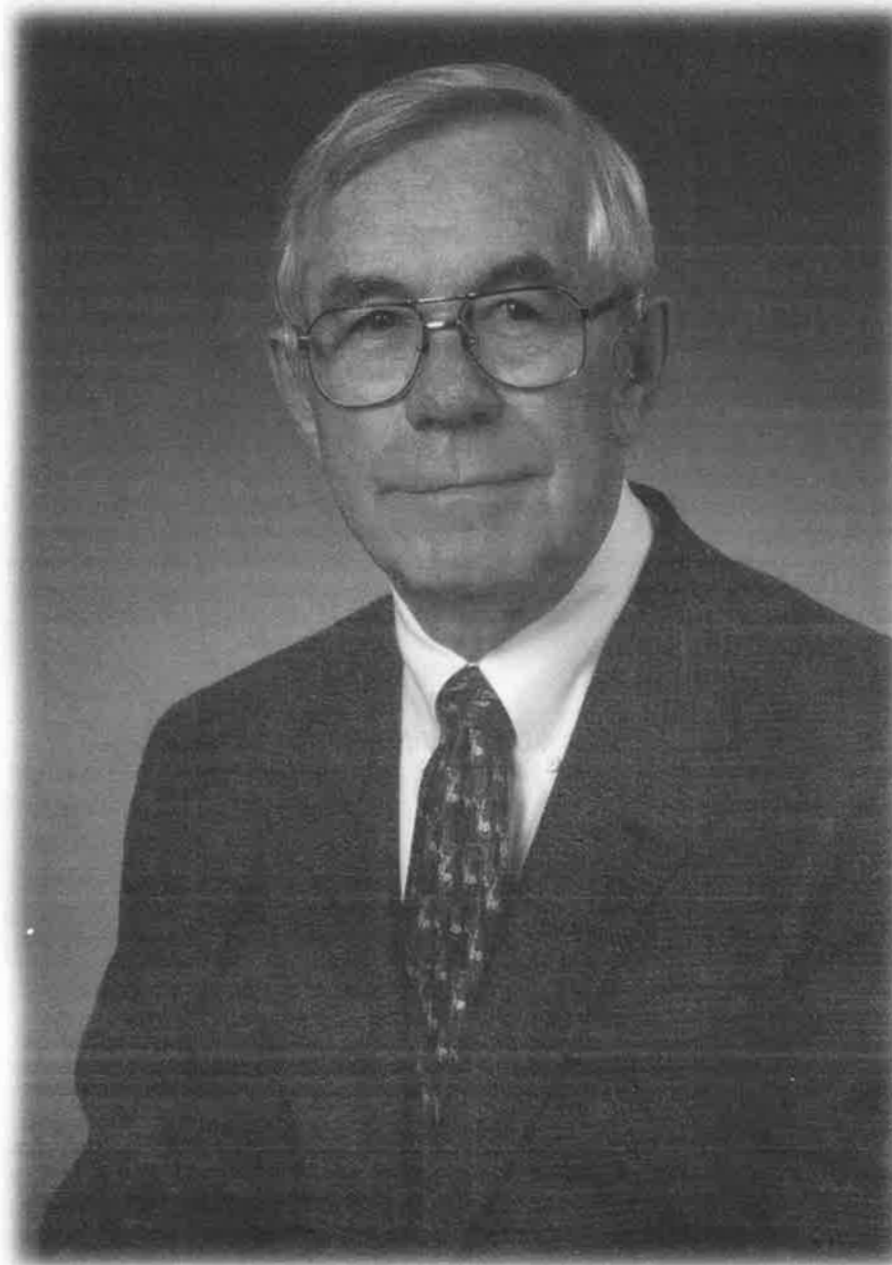
So he decided to try law, and he came to law school at UW - and that was a perfect fit. It was

In those days, the law school was still above the library. "I think we've worn out about three law schools since," he says. "I couldn't have gotten better legal education than at UW."

Don Chapin

what he calls a "wonderful time." In those days, the law school was still above the library. "I think we've worn out about three law schools since," he says. "I couldn't have gotten better legal education than at UW."

His fellow students made an impression on him too. "There were great giants there then, like Jim Barrett and



Ed Herschler," he says. Ed Herschler went on to eventually become governor of Wyoming, and it was in that capacity that he appointed Chapin to UW's board of trustees in 1977. Chapin would serve for two six-year terms, and become president of the board from

1984 to 1986.

During his 12 years of service on the board, Chapin had the chance to see a lot of change. "We went through some strange times," he says. "We seemed to have a lot of money for awhile. We did some good things. Then that went away."

But even when money was tight, Chapin says the trustees had the benefit of good leadership. "Don Veal shepherded us through some strict times," Chapin says. "He understood the campus, the people. He really did an excellent job as president and avoided a lot of problems that could have occurred." In addition, "the faculty senate worked with us in concert," Chapin says. "They understood the transfer of good times to not-so-good times."

Chapin recalls the controversy that brought on one of the board's more difficult times. The university had holdings in companies that had established business in South Africa; this was during a time when a great deal of international attention was focused on the still-existing policy of apartheid. "Some of

the members on the board thought we ought to dispose of those holdings. It was pretty intense for a little while," Chapin says. "It was a very emotional issue on campus."

Another difficult and delicate situation for the board arose in 1976, when conflict between UW and Casper College heightened over a proposed plan to expand to a four-year college in Casper. The plan was close to being realized. It was a potentially divisive situation.

Chapin, who had also been a trustee at Casper College, was instrumental in formulating the compromise, which resulted in an upper level degree-granting program at Casper and other community colleges under the aegis of UW. In the end it turned out to be a considerable expansion of educational opportunities in Wyoming.

During the good times, "I think we raised some salaries for faculty," Chapin says. "There was more openness, more interest in staff. They participated more and had a voice. We had good football teams, good basketball, good athletic directors and coaches, including baseball at that time. And the Foundation was increasingly successful in gathering money in Wyoming and elsewhere." During that period, there was some expansion of accounting, and liberal arts flourished. "The geology department had always been good, but continued to be outstanding."

Chapin looks back with satisfaction on his time as a trustee. "I think we did a good job," he says. "We maintained the university. We tried to meet the needs of UW. It was also very enjoyable and fulfilling - I think the trustees generally felt that way."

Chapin, who was also a member of the board of directors of UW's Alumni Association, still spends a considerable amount of time in community service. "Giving money in a prudent manner is hard work," Chapin says, and he does that work for both the Tate Private Charitable Foundation and the Myra Fox Skelton Foundation.

Having practiced law in Casper for 52 years, Chapin has been, and remains, involved in his community in many ways. He's been president of the Central Wyoming Council of Boy Scouts, a member and president of the Casper College Board, a member of the Casper Area Community Foundation and of the United Way. Chapin has received the Chamber of Commerce Commendation Award for civic service.

Chapin, who celebrated his 50th wedding anniversary with his wife, Gwen, last November, is also still busy practicing law in Casper, with no plans to retire. He explains, "You always think you're gonna fish that next hole and then quit - and pretty soon you're at the top of the mountain."

