

UW Medallion Service Award

Thomas E. Davidson, UW Medallion Service Award

By Julianne Couch
Alumnews Editor

Fast Facts:

EDUCATION: BS' 61, Agriculture
OCCUPATION: National Magazine
advertising/publishing, retired 2001
SELECTED ACCOMPLISHMENTS:
Advertising Age Top 100 sales reps in
U.S.; Top sales award, *Good Housekeeping*
magazine; 2007 College of Agriculture
Outstanding Alumni; Agriculture
Dean's Advisory Board; 2009 College of
Business Distinguished Service award;
College of Business Advisory Board;
UW Alumni Association Board; UW
Foundation Board; 2008 Epsilon Sigma
Phi Friends of Extension award.

Even though he is retired and living near a scenic lake in Wisconsin, Tom Davidson finds himself returning to his hometown of Laramie, and his university, several times a year. It isn't just that he's visiting friends or revisiting the days of his youth, though that might be part of it. Mostly, Tom Davidson is committed to service, especially to the University of Wyoming.

His first involvement with UW occurred in the late 1980s, when he raised funds for the Centennial Complex, which houses the UW Art Museum and the American Heritage Center. "I was fortunate to be there when some of these things have happened," Davidson said about the timing of his involvement with the university.

Davidson said much of his life has been shaped by circumstance, of one thing leading to another rather unexpectedly, by a series of "turning points." For instance, Davidson taught vocational agriculture at the high school in Pinedale, Wyo., upon graduation from UW. He recalls those days as the "most rewarding work" that he has ever done. "I had a lot of really good kids and parents that helped with our FFA projects. We received a National Gold Emblem award."

Because of that experience, Davidson said, "our whole lives changed." At

Pinedale he started the *Wyoming Future Farmer* magazine. That got him noticed, and he was offered a job in Washington, D.C. with *The National Future Farmer* magazine. During the next 32 years, Davidson worked in the Chicago area for major national farm and consumer magazines, including *Progressive Farmer*, *Southern Living*, *Successful Farming*, *Better Homes & Gardens* and *Good Housekeeping*.

"I learned by osmosis," Davidson said of his move from Vo-Ag to magazine advertising sales. "Because of my agriculture background I was able to talk to the agriculture people in a more professional manner. If somebody had walked up to me in Pinedale, Wyoming and told me I was going to retire as Midwest manager of *Good Housekeeping* in Chicago, well, I would have never believed it."

In spite of his successful career in magazine advertising and public relations, Davidson said he missed the satisfaction he felt working with students. Although he never wanted to return to teaching, that impulse to help students spurred his involvement with the College of Agriculture, and with the College of Business, helping to organize career centers and other student services.

On the College of Business Advisory Board, Davidson spearheaded the college's efforts to develop the Peter M. and Paula Green Johnson Career Center. As chairman, Davidson visited career centers in Wisconsin, Iowa and other states, visiting with directors "to help us be able to use their career centers for an example of what a career center should be like." Peter Johnson, past president of the College of Business Board, said he considered Davidson to be the "ultimate, ideal volunteer" whom he suspected "put in more hours of time than any other member of the board."

According to Brent Hathaway, Dean, College of Business, "Despite his busy and distinguished career, Tom stayed true to his UW roots through a variety of vehicles, including more than 20 years of service on six UW national advisory boards. However, his board involvement reveals only a fraction of his commitment and dedication to the university that reared him."

Davidson hasn't forgotten his "home" college, either. He said a new initiative in the College of Agriculture will help advisors, department heads and student organizations. "We have recently



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developed a student travel fund that is going to allow more students to participate in state and national activities," he said.

Frank Galey, Dean, College of Agriculture, said "Many of our students, department heads, and senior leadership either work with Tom directly or have benefitted from his efforts on behalf of the College of Agriculture and Natural Resources. Helping our students succeed academically, expanding the number of internships and career opportunities for students, and working with the Cooperative Extension Service to provide needed programs to Wyoming students, are all examples of Tom's efforts on behalf of the college."

Davidson's efforts on behalf of UW can be seen across the campus. In 1995, upon the passing of his father, James Davidson, he established the James and Blanche Davidson scholarship, honoring his father's contributions to the sheep industry. The elder Davidson was a long-time shepherd for UW.

Davidson assisted with the development and marketing of *UWyo* magazine and *Barnyards and Backyards*, a College of Agriculture publication. With ad sales in his blood, he is a volunteer sales rep for the latter magazine, generating more than \$80,000 in revenue over the last six years. He created a Cowboy Joe Pony scholarship program of alumni

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donor support for the student pony handlers; over \$30,000 in scholarships have been given out. He revitalized the Ag Appreciation Day barbecue event to benefit student groups. He created the Cowboy Joe Pony apparel sold in the UW Bookstore with proceeds benefitting student groups and programs.

Davidson grew up in Laramie, on property that was the UW Livestock Farm, now the Wyoming Territorial Prison historic site grounds. As a junior at UW, he was named Outstanding Member of the Alpha Tau Alpha Honorary Association for students in agriculture, and was its president in his senior year. He ran track and played basketball at UW, and says he still has friends from those days. In fact, it was through playing high school basketball that he noticed his future wife Ann (Graham) Davidson (BS '62) who was at that time a cheerleader for the high school in Rock Springs, Wyo. "I was very much aware of her," he said. There's no way I could be receiving this award if it had not been for her." Ann is a past president of the UW Art Museum board.

"What's really special about being on these UW boards is that Ann and I have met and worked with some of the best people in the state of Wyoming."

