

The Ottawa University Alumni Association Presents the
Distinguished Service Award
To
Ellen Ann (Henning) and Wilbur Wheaton
Both from the Class of 1954



If the term "Ottawa spirit" appeared in the dictionary, it could appropriately be illustrated with a picture of Ellen Ann (Henning) and Wilbur Wheaton, Class of 1954. These two outstanding individuals have distinguished themselves by their upbeat attitude, genuine warmth and lifelong service to faith, learning and leadership.

Their life paths converged at Ottawa University. Wilbur grew up as a minister's son in western Kansas and heard about OU at church; plus his older brother had attended. He recalls OU had a "minister's kids" discount in those days, which helped make his education possible. Ellen Ann

was a "town girl," having grown up in Ottawa. She agreed to attend OU – her mother's alma mater -- for a few years, but she planned to transfer to another school by her junior year.

In their sophomore year, Ellen Ann and Wilbur were in the same English Literature class. They began dating that year and the rest, as they say, is history. Ellen Ann never did transfer to another school, and they were married during semester break of their senior year.

The Wheaton's contributions to Ottawa University began with their enthusiastic contributions as students. Wilbur played football as an offensive guard. In his sophomore year he received NAIA Honorable Mention and was All-Conference in his junior year. Academically, he was a top student majoring in math. He was also a member of the Student Council and participated in the All-School play. Ellen Ann majored in music at OU and was a member of the University Concert Choir, the Symphonette and the String Quartet. She was listed in Who's Who in American Colleges and Universities in 1954.

Following graduation, Wilbur went directly into the Marine Corps as a result of his commitment to a summer reserve program. Service life took the couple to Virginia and California. When their commitment ended Wilbur pursued an M.Ed. from the University of Kansas, which he earned in 1957.

While raising two daughters and a son, Wilbur began his career in education teaching math in the Wichita school district. After relocating to California, he moved into administration as a counselor, vice principal, principal and assistant superintendent of schools. Wilbur obtained his Doctorate at the University of Southern California, Los Angeles, in Administration and Supervision in 1971. He

spent 13 years as District Superintendent for the Santa Maria, California schools – with an enrollment of 4500 students. Ellen Ann was a church organist and choir director during those years and played in the Santa Maria Symphony. Wilbur was recruited as District Superintendent for the Central Unified School District in Fresno, California in 1982.

In the fall of that same year, Ottawa University began a search for its fourteenth President. At first, Wilbur insisted that he could not be a candidate because of his recent appointment in the Fresno school district. But after prayerful consideration and much thought, Wilbur and Ellen Ann concluded that they were being called to serve. Dr. Wheaton assumed the office of President of the University in January 1983, and is the first graduate to serve in that position.

During their tenure as OU's "first couple," the Wheatons helped bring stability to the university and improve its financial standing. When Wilbur retired as president nine and a half years later, the student body had increased substantially, the physical plant had been improved, new adult centers and the international program were added, and the administration was expanding to include a new president and three provosts at each of the (then) adult campuses.

Released from their professional commitments, the Wheatons volunteered to teach at an American Baptist mission school in Thailand. Following two months of intensive language instruction, Ellen Ann taught music at the boarding school and played in the orchestra at the Maitrichit Baptist Church in Bangkok. She also taught English as a second language, as did Wilbur. In addition, Wilbur got back to his first love as a teacher – mathematics.

Throughout their lives, Ellen Ann and Wilbur have fostered close ties with Ottawa University. At one point, Wilbur was President of the Ottawa University Alumni Association. Both were very active in the Frank J. White alumni chapter during their southern California years, and Ellen Ann was President of that chapter. The pair has maintained a "class letter" for the OU Class of 1954 over the years, and took great delight in helping to organize their 50th reunion in 2004 – with the largest class turnout in recorded history and the largest class gift ever presented to the University. From their current home in Sedona, AZ, Ellen Ann and Wilbur help to anchor an enthusiastic "colony" of OU alumni who have retired to or winter in the area.

For their lifelong contributions to Ottawa University, their leadership in education and volunteerism for the American Baptist Church, the 2005 Distinguished Service Award is presented to Ellen Ann (Henning) and Wilbur Wheaton.

Distinguished Service Award

This award recognizes exceptional service in the church and/or community over a span of time. The award was established in 1974, and is the cornerstone of the OUAA's award system. No more than one or two such awards are granted each year.