



Protect and Nurture

The Campbell Years at Woodberry Forest School

MARY HINTERMANN
Correspondent

The 400 boys attending Woodberry Forest School this fall weren't even born yet when Dennis and Leesa Campbell arrived to take over leadership of the school. For 17 years Dennis and Leesa have led the prestigious boy's school and its legendary honor system through the challenges of the internet age and questions of relevancy in the 21st century. Campbell retired as the school's eighth headmaster this summer. The results, both tangible and intangible, have made the Campbell years some of the most transformative in the history of the school.

The international draw of the school and the stunning level of physical plant improvement are perhaps the most tangible accomplishments during this time. When the Campbells arrived in 1997 there were no international students at Woodberry; now international students comprise 10 percent of the student body. In fact, today Woodberry draws students from 30 U.S. states and 18 foreign countries.

"Dennis Campbell's legacy at Woodberry Forest School will be powerfully felt for generations. The campus has been transformed with a new academic quad featuring

significant new buildings such as the Manning Family Science Center, the new Terry Dining Hall and math/computer science building. Two thirds of Woodberry's greatest asset and future leadership, our faculty and administrative team, were hired by Dr. Campbell. Our endowment more than doubled under his leadership and he raised more money for the school than all previous headmasters combined," said Sion Boney, WFS Class of 1974 and Chairman of the WFS Board of Trustees.

Possibly the intangible accomplishments of his time at Woodberry give Dr. Campbell the most personal satisfaction and it is on these topics he will spend the first year of his retirement reflecting and writing. It is striking that a man with a background in ethics and theology should be charged with protecting and nurturing the schools legendary honor system at a time when the internet was beginning to challenge the very definition of individual scholarship. Campbell credits Woodberry's ability to navigate successfully where institutions like Harvard, the Air Force Academy and prestigious Stuyvesant High School in New York have recently faltered to two Woodberry Forest School principles working in tandem: the honor system and the 100 percent

residential nature of the boarding school.

Dr. Campbell reflects "I don't know what percentage of our boys arrive at school knowing that they have a fundamental right to be respected or if they even realize what it means in daily terms to live in a such a way as to be worthy of that respect. I do know that during their time we treat them that way, students and faculty both model what the honor system means and we enforce a strict, single-strike policy. When they graduate, I believe that everything the honor system stands for is a part of each one of them." Under Campbell's Woodberry's honor system expanded to include modern definitions of plagiarism and intellectual theft in a cut and paste world as well as the distinction between individual scholarship and cheating when collaboration is but a click away.

Put simply, educating teenage boys within a crucible where outside temptations are managed and rules are clear, consistent and enforced works. Frequently Dr. Campbell has been called upon to defend the 21st century relevancy of an 'all-male boarding prep school'. He responds by pointing to success of the Woodberry Forest School approach; that's all it takes to put such questions to rest.

Dr. Campbell wrote in A Community of Character that "The communal experience of being at Woodberry is life-enhancing and

life-changing." When asked how their lives have been enhanced and changed he replied "It is impossible to express what the Woodberry Forest community - faculty, staff and students- as well as our friends here have meant to us. We have an even greater appreciation for the support and sharing that is possible living within a close-knit community."

Friends of Dennis and Leesa feel just as fortunate. "On a personal level and as members of the founding family - decidedly a mini-group - Bernice and I have always felt it best to cheer from the sidelines," said Frank Walker, WFS Class of 1953. "Dennis and Leesa sought us out and involved us in plans and projects they envisioned for Woodberry. They gave us the joy and honor of helping to advance the dreams of Robert, Nannie, and Sallie Walker, and we are and will forever remain grateful for that. We wish them the absolute very best in whatever they choose to undertake in the future."

As the community bids farewell to two good friends and Woodberry Forest School says goodbye to its leaders, it is difficult if not impossible to find someone with the good fortune to know the Campbells who hasn't been likewise enhanced and changed by their decision to move to Woodberry Forest School 17 years ago.

Dr. Byron Hulsey, who graduated from Woodberry in 1986, is the school's new headmaster.

Woodberry Forest School Headmaster Dr. Dennis Campbell is retiring after 17 years at the school. Pictured at top, Dennis and Leesa Campbell take a break during the school's Habitat for Humanity Blitz Build. At right, Campbell talks to students preparing to graduate.

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