Of Libraries and Books  
— Diether H. Haenicke
By David Isaacson

[Diether H. Haenicke, President Emeritus of Western Michigan University, catalyzed significant and lasting changes in the University Libraries. Some four months before his retirement on July 31, 1998, he shared his observations, beliefs, and love of libraries and books that motivated his extraordinary 13 years of commitment to the Libraries at the University.]

Disappointing, very disappointing! Whenever Diether Haenicke first visits a university, he goes to see the main library. At Western Michigan University, his first impressions of the main library, Waldo, were not good ones. In fact, the library was crowded, poorly lit, and generally “unwelcoming” in every respect. The presence of an open dumpster adjacent to the back public entrance of Waldo Library seemed symbolic of an attitude, unconscious or not, of disrespect toward a place and a service that were central to the mission of every university. Indeed, he was so disappointed by his first view of the library system that, except for other, more attractive aspects of the University, he would have withdrawn his name for consideration as President. There was so much that needed to be done.

Accordingly, one of the first goals that the new president set when he began his tenure as president, in 1985, was to do something major with Waldo Library. The facility had to be prepared to accommodate the new technologies including a total electronic system (acquisitions, cataloging, circulation, resource sharing, online catalogs and indexes); little used resources had to be identified and stored elsewhere to provide space for major new collections; seating, carrels, and special areas had to be radically expanded or built; and, overall, the building had to become an attractive environment in which to study and do research. Within a few months, he saw and seized a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to obtain state funding for a major renovation of Waldo Library.

Today’s Waldo Library is completely unrecognizable from the building that Dr. Haenicke visited over 13 years ago. Symbolically attached to the University Computing Center by a bridge with a striking clock tower, Waldo Library is notable on the outside with an architectural design that has become a campus focal point. Remodeled at a cost of $19.5 million, it reopened in April of 1992. That transformation provides doubled seating capacity, thirty-eight faculty research carrels, study rooms, two state-of-the-art instructional classrooms, and a sophisticated online computer catalog, as well as dozens of computer terminals accessing the World Wide Web and a multitude of electronic data bases.

Diether Haenicke is especially pleased that the Board of Trustees has set aside a room in Waldo Library for his office. That space is located near one of his favorite places in Waldo—the beautifully appointed Meader Rare Book Room. The rare book room, on the third floor, and the adjacent Special Collections Department, constitute the “jewel in the crown” of the renovated Waldo—and Dr. Haenicke was personally involved in the design of both areas. Recently, The Western Michigan University Magazine (Spring 1998), itemized the President’s favorite things. Not surprising is his favorite building: “Waldo Library. It is what I hoped for right from the start” (p. 31).

Of course, the physical appearance of a library does not make a library. Equally, if not more important, is the substance of the collection itself—the breadth and depth of its books, periodicals, and multi-media resources. Diether Haenicke was quick to test the quality of WMU’s collection, by looking toward his own interests: German language, literature, and history. Although he found the areas adequate, he also could tell that the collections did not meet the needs of an evolving University—especially the University that he planned WMU to be—a graduate intensive, research oriented institution. As a result, he resolved early—and kept that resolution—to allocate significantly more dollars to the library acquisitions budget than had ever occurred before in the history of the school. Recently, Dean Lance Query noted that, since 1990, “priority funding has occurred every year.” Moreover, the library has received over $700,000 in one-time funds—a figure that, in March of 1998, Diether Haenicke rounded off to an even million.

The financial commitment of Dr. Haenicke to the University Libraries is unquestionable. He has attempted to support library resources for each new academic program that has been approved. Among them, of course, are some uniquely expensive undergraduate degrees such as engineering and nursing, plus a dozen and a half new doctoral programs. All are part of the ultimate objective to achieve status as a Research University II under the Carnegie Classification. State support for funding has not come easily. Presentations about the high cost and inflation of library acquisitions, especially for serials, are not something about which legislators are often interested. Although this President was successful with the legislature on several occasions, he also admits, with regret, that he hasn’t done all that he wanted to do for the University library collections, or its overall staffing.

When Diether Haenicke speaks of librarians, he speaks with a special awareness. He appreciates the role of educated and dedicated library personnel who must be there to interpret collections and to teach retrieval strategies to students, faculty, and staff. Carol Haenicke, the President’s wife, whose career in

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public libraries included more than a decade in Portage as well as earlier work in Ohio has reminded Diether of how important trained staff are to the use of libraries. He believes her—as his record shows. He also is very proud of the Carol Ann Haenicke Collection of American Women’s Poetry that he established in the Special Collections Department of the University Libraries. The Haenicke Collection is, indeed, a rare collection for any campus. That collection of American women poets, covering 200 years of writing, honors his wife, one of her scholarly interests, and offers valuable research opportunities in an area in which the University now offers a doctoral degree.

When commenting on the need for more professionals for the University Libraries, Dr. Haenicke made special note of the Libraries' programs of information literacy and increased attention to library instruction. He is hopeful that both areas will continue to grow. He remarked upon the somewhat ironic fact that despite a heavily automated library environment, even more dominated by electronic databases that presumably make information more accessible, we need more librarians with specialized expertise to locate and interpret library resources for users.

Books and libraries have always been, needless to say, an important part of Diether Haenicke's life. Some of his most fond memories are of his mother and father reading books aloud to the children in the evening after dinner. Even today, his leisure time is devoted to only two choices: reading and classical music. Dr. Haenicke still keeps in touch with a now elderly high school teacher who helped to inspire his love of literature as a young man. But, this strong advocate of books does have painful memories that center around the book burnings he was forced to watch when he was a young boy during the Third Reich. The “suspect” authors whose works were burned by the Nazis are, he reflects, among the most accomplished of authors—Jewish and non-Jewish.

Dr. Haenicke's discussion of books and libraries concluded with a personal reminiscence on the central importance of the influence that teachers have on students. When Diether Haenicke decided to work on his doctorate in German literature, he was especially honored to be asked to work on a dissertation in history by the scholar Franz Schnabel. This scholar and teacher profoundly influenced the young Haenicke because Schnabel had not only survived the Nazis, but had become so much more prolific and dedicated after the war ended. An academic library can be gifted with a rich stock of books, but students need the inspiration of professors such as Schnabel who encourage them to study, think, and learn. Diether Haenicke says that one of the most common things he hears, from both graduating students as well as alumni, is how much of a difference particular professors have made in their lives. He adds that he then tells those graduates and alumni that their thanks should be given directly to the professors—not to him alone.

And so, Diether Haenicke, we who serve the University Libraries and/or are part of the Friends of the University Libraries will take this opportunity to thank a man who made a difference in our lives and in the life of the University Libraries at Western Michigan University. You have given generous personal and intellectual as well as financial support to the Libraries. Welcome to your office on the third floor of Waldo Library.

Diether H. Haenicke's commitment to libraries and Western Michigan University has been definitively accentuated by his establishment, on July 27, 1998, of a $1.5 million endowment to be "used at the discretion of the Dean of Libraries...to fund University library acquisitions." The guidelines further specify that the endowment is "intended to augment, rather than replace or reduce existing general fund support...."

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art museums including the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Art Institute of Chicago, the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, and the J. Paul Getty Museum. These museums are providing high resolution images and descriptive information of selected works from their collections that are then delivered electronically to subscribing libraries.

Of course, seeing a virtual object d'art is not the same as viewing the real thing, but resources found in collections such as the Art Museum Image Consortium expose patrons to works of art that they might ordinarily be unable to see without visiting museum collections. Since AMICO includes museum cataloging records along with the image of the art work, those who access AMICO are able to get more information about a work of art than those who actually visit the museum and "see" the real work of art.

Western Michigan University is fortunate to have been chosen as one of the 20 AMICO Library University Testbed Sites for the 1998-1999 academic year. As a testbed library, patrons and staff have the advantage of trying out and experimenting with the imagebase, and, in turn, providing the project developers with feedback as to ease of use and accuracy of the system. This information will then be used by the project investigators to make necessary modifications, and, ultimately, to make available the best possible imagebase.

The University Libraries is also engaged in its own digital image collection. Images from the slide collection will be available to patrons using our WestCat system. Since the collection has been growing by thousands of images every few months, the ability to locate exact images through the OPAC will be of great benefit to users. A recent addition, during the winter semester, 1998, brought over 1400 slides of medieval manuscripts from the Pierpont Morgan and Bodleian libraries to the Visual Resources Library.

Remember, when needing inspiration for a paper on interior design, an image for a lecture on World War II's Pacific Theater, a picture of mid-twentieth century cotton processing equipment, proof that paper dresses really did exist in the 60s, or just a reminder of the innocence of Charles Kingsley's Water Babies, there is a source at Western Michigan University. See you—and the picture—at the Visual Resources Library, 2213 Sangren Hall.