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Rebel with a Cause: Day Found Second Chance at Linfield

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Rebel with a cause

Day found second chance at Linfield

T.J. Day '71 followed an unorthodox path to Linfield College, and has been inextricably linked to the college since.

Day has been a staunch – but quiet – figure, advancing and promoting Linfield College for more than 30 years. He's worked behind the scenes, encouraging gifts from his family's charitable foundations and donating his own funds to a variety of Linfield projects. His most recent commitment, \$3 million to help renovate Northup Hall, is the largest gift by a living individual in the college's history. Day was also instrumental in securing funding for the development of the Keck Campus on the former Hewlett-Packard property. Elected to the Board of Trustees in 1972, he is one of its longest-serving members. Currently Day serves as the board's vice chair and he also chairs the college's campaign committee. He encourages students who will benefit from the Linfield experience to enroll in what he believes is one of the best liberal arts colleges in the United States.

As a teenager, after just two months at a New England college, Theodore J. "T.J." Day was miserable. His mother insisted he stay, so Day simply closed his books, and by the end of the semester he was back home in California. He applied to 10 or 12 major West Coast universities and he was not admitted by any because of his Eastern college grades. But Tom Meicho '51, then dean of admission at Linfield, reviewed his record and saw potential. He told Day if he took two summer classes at Linfield and did well in them, he could enroll. Day aced both courses – statistics and astronomy.

More comfortable in jeans and boots than a business suit, Day is described by those who know him best as witty and mischievous but always a gentleman, opinionated but willing to listen to other views, and genuine in everything he does and says. He doesn't flaunt his position or his education, which includes two master's degrees from Stanford University.

"I find him publicly introverted and privately an extrovert," said Dave Hansen, vice president of student services, dean of students and a longtime friend. "There is nothing false about T.J. What you see is exactly what you get."

With his engaging personality, Day was well known and well liked on campus. His natural charisma and fun-loving spirit drew students to him.

"That's not to say he wasn't someone on the edge of getting into trouble, but he walked that fine line pretty carefully," Hansen said with a laugh.

Day, reticent to talk about himself, is more comfortable sharing stories about some of his college escapades.



T.J. and Debbie Day attended the inauguration ceremony for President Thomas L. Hellie in 2007.

His yellow 1970 Plymouth Hemi Superbird, which became a legend on campus, was known for making it to Portland in record time. His roommate trained a monkey to retrieve food that other students stored in rain gutters to keep cool. And then there was that time T.J. melted the speed bumps the college had installed.

Day is quick to credit his Linfield education with preparing him for graduate school and beyond. The faculty in business and economics, including Hansen, Levi Carlile and Harold Elkinton, along with Meicho, all figure prominently in his personal success.

"They were supportive and pushed me when I needed to be pushed," Day said. "The college and Tom Meicho gave me the break of my life, when all the other colleges on the West Coast said no. It is what I needed at that point in my life – a small, tight-knit place where I could have good relationships with professors and advisors."

But of all the individuals who helped him, Day said Hansen was the most influential.

"He was very motivating," Day said. "During my sophomore year, he said, 'You need to go to graduate school. You are very good at coasting and you need to start to work harder.'"

Hansen, reluctant to take any credit for Day's success, does recall pushing him.

"My role was to get him to recognize that he had potential and that he had some obligation to use that potential, which he has clearly done," Hansen said. "That's a role we take seriously here with all of our students."

Day took Hansen's advice, completing an M.B.A. and a master's in applied earth sciences at Stanford University. There, he found that the solid education he had received from the business and economics faculty at Linfield helped him succeed.

"I was ahead of the curve in economics and in accounting, so I could focus on classes that I really needed to work on," he said.

After graduating from Linfield and Stanford, Day worked for Canadian Superior Oil, Ltd, in Calgary, Alberta, Canada. In 1978, he moved to Reno, Nev., as a senior partner of Hale Day Gallagher Company which specialized in the brokerage and development of commercial and industrial real estate. He is currently chairman of Dacole Co., a private investment company.

Day and his wife, Debbie, a Portland native, are avid horse lovers and like nothing better than spending time on their Nevada ranch. He serves as a member of the board of directors for numerous companies and orga-

nizations including Sierra Pacific Resources, Reno Air Race Association, Nevada State Athletic Commission, Boy Scouts of America, National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum, Sierra Nevada College, Robert Louis Stevenson School, the W.M. Keck Foundation and the Willametta K. Day Foundation. He's been honored for service by Junior Achievement, the University of Nevada Reno and its medical school, and he and Debbie were recently named Republicans of the Year by the Nevada Republican Party.

Linfield President Thomas L. Hellie said Day is a respected advisor and strategist, whose ability to think creatively is crucial in moving Linfield forward.

"TJ's experience with the institution and his insight into business and higher education have helped shape Linfield's future," Hellie said. "He is one of the college's greatest supporters. And he is a loyal friend."

Day considers his latest gift payback to Linfield for putting him on the right track and he hopes it will inspire others to give – at whatever level they can.

"I've been lucky to be able to make this donation," he said. "I hope it sets a pace and a benchmark and that others with ties to Linfield will realize they need to help, too."

– *Mardi Mileham*



T.J. Day '71 in front of the Grand Union Hotel in Fort Benton, Mont., during an annual week-long motorcycle trip with a group of Reno, Nev., businessmen (aka "Rolex Riders"). Day, more comfortable in jeans and boots than a business suit, said Linfield's small community and the personal attention from professors was instrumental in shaping his future.