



COURTESY OF RON HALL

Celebrating: School of Public Policy Dean James R. Wilburn was honored with a dinner at the Beverly Hills Hotel for his work at Pepperdine. Wilburn's career at Pepperdine began in 1971 as a history professor.

Wilburn honored for 40 years in academics

By **RACHEL MILLER**
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A simple photograph was the talk of the night. A woman standing in front of a small building, Decker Canyon School. She taught all her students in one little schoolhouse. Harriet Wilburn was her name. The year was 1915.

This photo sits on the desk of School of Public Policy Dean James R. Wilburn, representing the spirit and tenacity of his grandmother, a spirit that runs in the family.

Jon Kemp, class of 1994, spoke of this photograph's relevance to the celebration. "I prefer to think of Jim like the woman in the photo, like a pioneer. He never sought to enrich himself, but build a place for others. He fought hard to make this country and university a better place."

Thursday, Oct. 27, at the Beverly Hills Hotel, Wilburn's four-decade-long academic career was honored, along with his service and dedication to the University. The event, "Past, Present & Future," included a reception, followed by a dinner with remarks by numerous friends and colleagues of Wilburn.

"He might have become a full-time university professor and scholar, or he could have become a minister if he'd chosen to do so," President Andrew K. Benton said. "He also could have had a fine career in politics, but instead, Jim chose to forego other options and to pursue a career at George Pepperdine College. Pepperdine has been changed forever because of his presence."

In 1971 Wilburn came to GPC as a history professor. He later worked his way into administration, as he became the provost and then the vice president for University Affairs.

At that point, he decided to return to school to earn his MBA at the then School of Business Management, today known as the Graziadio School. His role as dean of the business school

was announced at his graduation ceremony in 1982. He held this position for 12 years.

Plans were announced at his inauguration to build, above Pepperdine's law school, a graduate campus, Drescher, which now houses three of the five University schools. Wilburn has held the role as dean of Pepperdine's School of Public Policy since 1996, when the program first began. Along with his academic endeavors, Wilburn holds a chairman position in the U.S. Committee to Assist Russian Reform, and he is a member of the European Parliament Industrial Council.

Admiration for Wilburn radiated from attendees at his event. Alumnus Jon Kemp gave many remarks and heart-warming insights into Wilburn's career and personality throughout the evening. "He is known by his infectious laugh and he has a great sense of humor. I have never met an individual that is more humble."

After a short video, honoring Wilburn's career and the president's message, honoree Wilburn addressed his audience.

"Every table here tonight has stories that have enriched my life," Wilburn said. "When I look back, I think of the people I was with [in my career]." He spoke of a hike he took the morning of the event, in which he reached a point among the bluffs and he looked back on Pepperdine in admiration, a university he was instrumental in relocating to its Malibu campus.

Near the close of the event, it was announced that Wilburn will be honored, as his name will be given to the largest lecture hall of the graduate school, the James R. Wilburn Auditorium.

Along with Wilburn's emphasis on future possibilities during his time at Pepperdine, Keith McFarland, in the video presentation, spoke of Wilburn's potential to further enhance the University. "It's not what has he done for Pepperdine, but what will he do?"

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