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Educator Who Laid Foundation for GWU Noel Center for Disability Resources Passes Away

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Office of University
Communications

September 26, 2017

Dr. Jerry Potter Began University's Program for Deaf Students


BOILING SPRINGS, N.C.—Dr. Jerry Potter, who helped Gardner-Webb University establish a program for the Deaf in the fall of 1977, passed away Sept. 14. His work on this program laid the foundation for what is now the Noel Center for Disability Resources. In the 40 years since its beginning, the program has provided necessary accommodations to thousands of students.



Dr. Jerry Potter

Potter was director of Deaf Ministries for the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina (BSCNC) when he was contacted by GWU President Craven Williams about beginning a grant-funded program for the Deaf at Gardner-Webb. Potter had worked in Deaf missions for BSCNC for 26 years. He was excited to develop the new program at GWU, and the BSCNC paid his salary for two years as he served as the University's first program coordinator.

One deaf student attended the first year and was provided a sign language interpreter and other services. Potter traveled to GWU every week from his home in Thomasville, N.C., to coordinate the program and also teach a class in sign language for hearing students. The next year, more deaf students arrived at GWU and Potter and his wife Ruth moved to Gardner-Webb. She interpreted in the classroom and helped with extracurricular activities. In the early 80s, a program was established for the blind and visually impaired and by 1986 the Noel Center was created to help all students with disabilities.



Dr. Jerry Potter, left, tests the inductive loop with Mac McDaniel, a hard of hearing student at Gardner-Webb. Potter speaks into the transmitter that he is holding in his hand, and the sound is picked up by McDaniel's hearing aid.

The Potters' son, Phillip, came to Gardner-Webb in 1978 to finish his remaining two years of college. "I am indebted to my father in many ways. I feel my moral standards were of highest expectations due to his influence and I'm proud to be his son," Phillip shared.

Potter lived with Phillip for the final five months of his life. "My morning coffee will never be the same, nor will evenings watching Andy Griffith," he said. "I continue harvesting

okra, his favorite veggie, from the garden he planted in the spring. He was able to successfully fish from my neighbor's pond regularly, and I still go sit there with his rod and reel."

Located in the North Carolina foothills, Gardner-Webb University is a private, Christian, liberal arts university that prepares students to become critical thinkers, effective leaders and compassionate servants in the global community. Emphasizing a strong student-centered experience and rigorous academics, Gardner-Webb ignites learning and service opportunities for undergraduate and graduate students. Ignite your future at Gardner-Webb.edu.