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Center for the Performing Arts

Eulogy: Robert S. Capin

Good afternoon! I am Tom Kelly and I have known Bob Capin for nearly 5 decades.

Throughout that time Bob significantly enriched my life, as I know he has also enriched the lives of many of you who are with us today.

Currently I am a Professor of Strategic Management and Business Ethics at Binghamton University, the State University of New York - where I also have served for over two decades as University Vice President and Dean.

However, my relationship with Bob began at Wilkes College, as it was called at that time. So I will speak first of Bob's career and later of Bob as a truly exceptional human being.

But let me first take you back to Bob's growing up years. He was born in Harrisburg and raised in a modest home on the corner of 5th and McClay Streets. In those days it was a rough and tough part of town. His family did not own a car or take family vacations. During summer months, Bob would often sit on his front porch hoping that one of his friends' families would take him for a Sunday ride -and sometimes they did - for, even then, Bob had an affable and enjoyable personality that attracted people to him.

The high school that Bob attended in the early 1940s had an enrollment in which more than 50% of its students were from minority groups. Hence, Bob developed his sensitivity to the needs and rights of the underprivileged and the marginalized - a value that he would retain throughout his career and lifetime.

However, as a high school student, Bob's father, who worked for the Railroad, was able to arrange for Bob to take some train rides - and some of those took Bob to places such as New York City, Philadelphia, and Washington. Even with these brief half-day stay overs, Bob's horizons were expanded -and they fueled his interest to learn more about the larger world around him.

When he graduated from high school, Bob entered military service and served in the Pacific theater during World War II. He was assigned to be a radio operator on an oceangoing vessel. It would be in this role that Bob would get his first taste of teaching, because his intelligence and his communication skills - were recognized by the U.S. Navy - which subsequently asked Bob to teach new recruits how to become radio operators and technicians.

Bob would next take his leadership skills to a ship poised for the invasion of Okinawa - an invasion that never occurred due to the ending of the war. But his developing leadership skills would be applied effectively in many other settings throughout his lifetime, which I will discuss more fully in a moment.

Upon returning home, Bob married Libby Smulowitz, a young woman from Wilkes-Barre whom he had met earlier at a friend's wedding. It would become a marriage that would last for decades. It would create the wonderful Capin family, as we know it today.

At this time in his life, Bob also took full advantage of the new G.I. Bill to enter Wilkes College to study accounting. In addition to his collegiate studies, Bob regularly drove a tractor-trailer truck from Wilkes-Barre to Manhattan on behalf of a family- owned business, which often required him to load and unload the trailer. So Bob developed an appreciation for those who are engaged in manual labor.

As an undergraduate in accounting at Wilkes in the late 1940s and early 1950s, Bob distinguished himself as an outstanding student, and he acquired even greater interpersonal and leadership skills. Upon graduation, he was offered a position with a business firm in Lewistown, Pennsylvania, where Bob also started a part-time accounting business which he developed during evenings and on weekends. He was ambitious!

However, during his first year of employment, the President of this small company asked Bob to make an entry in the firm's accounting records that would overstate income for the purpose of giving the firm an advantage in obtaining a loan that it was seeking. Bob refused. The firm's president continued to pressure Bob and finally told Bob that unless he complied, he would be fired. Bob's response was, "Well, then I guess I'm fired." And he walked out. A brave and courageous decision for a first year accountant with a small family to take care of!

But this story underscores the fact that Bob Capin was one of the most ethical and moral individuals I have ever known.

As is often the case with such courageous stories, a development like this sometimes places the person in a position to embrace a new and better opportunity. This was the case for Bob. He and his family returned to Wilkes-Barre where Bob accepted a position with the large, regional accounting firm of Lavenenthal, and he attained his CPA certification.

However, the other part of this story is that, in coming back to Wilkes-Barre, Bob made the decision to seek a position, at first, on a part-time basis, teaching Accounting on the faculty of Wilkes... and thus he embarked on his pathway to the Presidency of this University.

His endearing personality, his knowledge of accounting, and his excellent teaching skills made Bob an excellent professor. And I know of these excellent teaching skills because I benefited in 1967 from taking an accounting course with Bob - and I have modeled some of his effective teaching techniques to this very day. His combination of abilities made him a renowned teacher whose classes quickly filled every semester. Many of his former students whom he personally mentored and counseled went on to be partners with the largest and most prestigious accounting firms in the world: KPMG, Price Waterhouse Coopers, Ernst & Young, and Deloitte. Bob was, indeed, a master teacher and masterful mentor.

But Wilkes would also soon recognize Bob's administrative and leadership abilities. Bob was appointed as Director of the growing Evening and Summer College Program, which blossomed under his supervision. It was also at this time that Bob completed his MBA degree from Lehigh University and began to teach graduate courses at Wilkes in addition to undergraduate courses. Bob's continued success in teaching and academic leadership positions led Wilkes to subsequently ask Bob to serve as Academic Dean, then Acting President, and, finally, as President.

One of the hallmarks of Bob's presidency was his successful efforts to solve the financial challenges facing Wilkes in the late 1970s which had emanated from the 1972 Hurricane Agnes Flooding - which took place 43 years ago on this very date. And, in this regard, I want to segue, for a moment, to Dr. Francis Michelini, the second President of Wilkes College, who is here with us today. I clearly remember "Dr. Mike", as he was called, standing in the parking lot of Weckesser Hall in a hard hat, telling us that Wilkes would survive and would open that September -which it did- and assigning us to our daily chores to take steps toward that opening. That great flood had caused extensive damage not only to the physical facilities at Wilkes, but also to its financial operations. The latter were longer-lasting. Those challenges would be left to Bob Capin during his presidency. Now, concerning the financial operations of the college, I must say that, in my 45 year career as a senior administrative leader in higher education, Bob Capin is unmatched in his ability to make financial decisions and develop financial plans and budgets in a way to lift a college or university out of a serious challenge. He also is one of the most ethical people to develop and implement financial plans. I learned a great deal from Bob, because, by that time, I had completed my PhD at Cornell University, and Bob had called me back serve as a young Dean on his Senior Staff.

At the same time Bob's interpersonal skills and, once again, his leadership capabilities enabled us to complete the successful, multi-year, multi-million-dollar, Alpha Campaign, which was a comprehensive gifts campaign designed to increase the endowment, refurbished historic buildings, including Kirby Hall, provide scholarships for students, and enlarge the reputation of the College... and then a year or so later we returned to capital gifts fundraising for much needed funds to construct Evans Hall. All of these contributions allowed Wilkes to remain competitive and to more fully recover from the doubts-and-the damage of the previously mentioned natural disaster.

During these campaigns Bob and I traveled together extensively on behalf of Wilkes. We visited alumni, foundations, and corporations from Chicago to Boston, and from New York to Philadelphia to Washington, and even to Houston and Austin. On many of our travels Bob discussed important decisions -sometimes difficult decisions- that Bob had to make on behalf of Wilkes. He often asked my advice, as he also did of others back on campus, in making such decisions. These discussions and the integrity with which he made the decisions gave me valuable insights for the subsequent decades. Such travels and discussions enable you to get to know the real fiber of integrity of a person -as I was blessed to do- in knowing and working with Bob.

Although there were numerous successes on these travels - which I could detail for you - I wish simply to share a humorous story about our experiences "on the road", so to speak. Those of you who know Bob's wonderful sense of humor, also know that he would approve of my sharing this story. And I'm sure that he will be smiling with us.

In the late 1970s we were able to gain an appointment to visit the Pew Trust, one of the largest foundations in the United States. It was located in Philadelphia. We sought a major grant for the College. Our visit was on a sunny day in June after an all-night rainfall. We were fashionably dressed in our tan Palm Beach suits with dark ties, and we walked confidently from our hotel toward Rittenhouse Square, where the Pew Trust was located. The side streets in Philadelphia are quite narrow, as you know. The rain had puddled here and there. All of a sudden a taxi turned the corner and sped down the narrow, little side street - splattering us with dirty rainwater. Our light colored suits were thoroughly speckled. We looked like Dalmatians!

What should we do? With only five minutes remaining to our appointment, Bob calmly said, "We are going in!" And we did! With his winning smile and calm words, Bob unapologetically explained what happened, and his explanation elicited an apology from the Pew Trust Grants Officer, who said, "I'm so sorry. This does happen occasionally to our visitors on a morning after a rainfall." We went on to have a successful visit - and, by the way, we received the grant! It was for \$100,000, which, nearly 40 years ago, was significant.

Bob enjoyed our recollection of this story as recently as last August. At that time I was presenting a research paper at an International Academic Meeting which happened to take place in Philadelphia. The location of the hotel was near Rittenhouse square.

I walked to the square after lunch one day and sat on a bench in the sunshine thinking back to that June morning. I realized how much Bob had shaped Wilkes after one of its greatest challenges. If it were not for Bob, in my opinion, Wilkes would have struggled mightily and would not have accomplished all that it has in recent decades. He set the financial and academic framework for the longer-term development of the University. I also reflected upon how much he had shaped my life and my career. So I pulled out my cell phone and called Bob, and we subsequently laughed and rejoiced in this mutual memory.

Upon his retirement from Wilkes, Bob was offered the position of Partner at the accounting firm of Parente and Randolph, in which he served for the remainder of his career.

During his retirement Bob began to teach a popular class at the JCC which focused on current events, particularly as they affected the United States and Israel. This class overflowed with people who were interested in current events, but who also just wanted to be with Bob and benefit from the enjoyment of his teaching.

Throughout my years of friendship with Bob I also learned of his great love and devotion to his immediate family: Two of Bob's adult children and their spouses are with us this morning.

Ellen Capin Haussler and Bob Haussler

David and Joyce Capin.

We also acknowledge Debbie Capin Buckler, Bob's daughter who unfortunately passed away.

Ellen and David, together with Debbie, you three were the "apples of your father's eyes". On our travels you were always the first individuals about whom he spoke. Your accomplishments, as well as your challenges, were topics from which I perceived and understood your Dad's unconditional and unparalleled love for you. He was so very proud of who you have become -and so very grateful for who you were in his life.

Of equal importance was Bob's late wife, Libby, and his love for her as they created this wonderful family...for Bob's family was at the center of his focus. I want to pause for a moment and acknowledge Libby Capin's significant roles in Bob's family life as wife, mother, grandmother, and great-grandmother. I also point to the way in which Libby opened the President's House at Wilkes and together, with Bob, graciously hosted many friend-raising receptions and dinners that my wife, Nancy, and I were fortunate to attend over the years.

And, Ellen and David, if you were the "apples of your father's eyes", Bob's grandchildren were indeed the "Apple blossoms" of his eyes... for he loved each of you and spoke about you in endearing ways that would always make him smile. We acknowledge the grandchildren:

Jeffrey and Mark Lubin

Abigail and Claire Capin

Rea Bochner

Joshua and Aaron Buckler

Shira Dragan,

as well as several great grandchildren, nieces, and nephews.

We also acknowledge *Sally Connor*, a very special family friend of the Capin family.

For as long as I have known Bob, his family was central and of paramount priority in his life. He was so proud of each of you and he loved you dearly. All of you meant the world to him. He was a great blessing to you - and you, in turn, were great blessings to Bob.

I also gained considerable respect for Bob with regard to the high level of integrity with which he lived his life. As a business ethics professor, I can assuredly say that Bob Capin lived his life as a stellar example of business and professional ethics in action. He was an exemplar for all of us. His principles were important to him. His word was secure. People trusted Bob, and they liked him! All of these qualities made him an effective leader, mentor, and friend.

In reflection upon the thoughts that I have shared with you today, we have discussed Bob Capin as a leader in a military setting, in the classroom, as a teacher and mentor, as the CEO of Wilkes University, and as President of many community and religious organizations, as well as a leader in his family. Bob Capin was a leader for all seasons!

Bob told me late in his life that each morning he said a prayer that went something like this: "God, help me to do some good for someone today." Well, God must have been listing not only on those mornings, but on many mornings, because Bob did a great deal of good for many people over the nearly 90 years of his life. It was indeed a life well lived! And we all have been truly blessed to have known him.

And now, in this spirit, and with respect for Bob's faith, I wish to close with the beautiful words so familiar to Jews and Christians, which were used by Aaron to teach his sons how to call upon God for His blessings for the children of Israel. I paraphrase them now as a wish and a prayer for Bob:

May the Lord bless you and keep you,

The Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious unto you,

The Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you his Peace.

Amen.

Thank you