

New campus think tank centered on vision, values

By Brad Isles

Students and faculty often come to Grove City College because of its vision and values in the matters of faith, freedom and education. Now there's another "brand" of learning on campus, and it ties those ideals together.

The Center for Vision & Values at Grove City College will serve as a permanent home to scholarly study of faith and freedom and the implications they have on public policy, according to Administrative Director Lee Wishing '83.

"What's most unique about the Center is its perspective and content," Wishing said.

The Center is a culmination of several years of work, and dates back to the standards and thinking of J. Howard Pew, Class of 1900, who served as a trustee at the College from 1912 to 1971. Also, retired professor Dr. L. John Van Til and Dr. John Sparks '66 helped lay a foundation for the Center by writing position papers on a variety of social and political issues. Later, Sparks developed and hosted institutes at the College dealing with market economics and faith.

"Those were usually five days long and done in the summer," said Sparks, now dean of the Alva J. Calderwood School of Arts and Letters. "We got some experience and made contacts with foundations and with various speakers. Those helped lay the groundwork for the Center."

Evolving from those seminars and other campus activities was the bulletin "Vision & Values." It has been published for the past 13 years by the College's Alumni Association and Sparks serves as its editor. It comes out three to four times per year and is circulated to 30,000 alumni, friends



MICHAEL MEDVED BROADCAST HIS NATIONALLY SYNDICATED RADIO SHOW FROM THE GROVE CITY COLLEGE CAMPUS DURING THE CENTER FOR VISION & VALUES' CONFERENCE ON POVERTY. / Photo by Jim Judkis

of the College and other interested parties.

"Vision & Values Concise" is a similar compilation sent out electronically to some 2,300 subscribers and features shorter opinion pieces dealing with subjects of current interest in economics, politics, social policy, religion, science and literature.

"The last five to 10 years, our faculty members have been doing research from faith and freedom perspectives in their own field," Wishing said. "They've been doing this research and then started writing opinion pieces. They were getting picked up and we found there was a market for their ideas."

More recently, the seed for the Center was planted prior to President Dr. John Moore's retirement in 2003. In fact, in the search process for the eighth President, Dr. Richard Jewell '67 stressed having a Center as vital to the College's future.

Settling on a name for the Center wasn't difficult.

"Vision and values – vision of freedom and Christian values," Sparks said. "We determined it was kind of a brand. We decided to make use of the existing brand that had recognition among alumni and friends. That branding idea actually came out of a discussion with President Jewell and Richard Larry ('60), a member of the Board of Trustees."

The Center kicked off its official operations April 4-5 with a conference titled, "The Road from Poverty to Freedom: A Look Backward and Forward at The War on Poverty." It featured internationally known speakers, alumni and faculty members.

"I thought that the presence of actual neighborhood revitalization workers from places like Washington, D.C., Pittsburgh and Akron lent an authenticity to the conference," said Sparks, who served as

the Center's executive director until the conference. "I think the interaction with our students and the presenters and then the other outside registered guests meant that there was a lot of interchange and consideration of different positions."

Associate Professor of Political Science Dr. Paul Kengor, noted author, speaker and scholar, was appointed the Center's new executive director. That announcement was made during the conference's kickoff luncheon on April 4. Kengor joined the Grove City College faculty in 1997.

Among those in attendance at the conference on poverty were speakers at the previous institutes. They included Michael Medved, who broadcast his nationally syndicated radio show from the Hall of Arts and Letters for two days; Robert L. Woodson Sr., president of the National Center for Neighborhood Enterprise; and retired Grove City College economics professor Dr. Hans Sennholz. (Read more on the conference speakers on pages 8-9.)

"I was really pleased all the way around," Wishing said. "The support of the College was great; there were so many people who pitched in to help leading up to conference and so many people showed up to help during. I was thrilled with the quality of the research and papers the speakers presented in advance of their appearance. The quality of the scholarly work was fantastic."

While Sparks expects there to be one or two conferences each year, the Center has a greater purpose – providing faculty members an opportunity to do more research in their fields. It gives them an outlet for that research through coursework, scholarly papers and opinion pieces in various media.

"One of our competitive advantages is we have people here doing their work," Wishing said. "We have a great knowledge base right here that we can leverage and build upon."

Sparks added that there are a "host of issues and questions" that can be addressed. "Third-world poverty, racial conflict, education at higher and the K-12 level, maintaining and rejuvenating



DEAN JOHN SPARKS '66 HELPED SPEARHEAD THE CENTER FOR VISION & VALUES AND SERVED AS ITS FIRST EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR. HIS SUCCESSOR, DR. PAUL KENGOR, WAS NAMED IN APRIL. / Photo by Jim Judkis

families ... I don't think we'll lack for issues," he said.

Opinion pieces by Grove City College faculty on topics such as these have run in more than 400 newspapers, to go along with several radio and television appearances. That opens another door for the College – a technological one. As of now, professors who are to appear on television must travel to Pittsburgh to get on a satellite uplink. With set times to do so, as well as teaching commitments, an on-campus television studio would alleviate a number of issues for faculty. The same goes for a radio studio for interviews and the possibility of having lectures streamed on the Internet. While there's no timetable for these advancements, Wishing is hopeful.

"We have a good technological base here and they've been supportive of us," he said. "Hopefully we can build on that."

The Center is also developing senior research and teaching fellowship positions as well as visiting scholar posts, in which

faculty from other institutions can interact with GCC faculty and students for a certain period of time, and perhaps participate in a conference. These positions also help with recruiting for faculty positions, Sparks said, as it gives them an opportunity to explore something other than just teaching.

Students will also benefit by having the opportunity to work with faculty members and help them with their research, which "gets them used to the nature of scholarly activity," said Sparks.

He added that other lecture series like the Pew, Sticht and Hopeman lectures will now come under the auspices of the Center, which is a rarity for a college of Grove City's size.

"Often, centers of one sort or another are at universities," said Sparks. "They are not usually well-integrated for the student body. They do their own thing and are isolated. That's not what we want. We want to enhance what's happening here."

(Brad Isles is Grove City's Allied News editor.)

