



RECALLING
**DADDY
BARRY**

by Abby Luby

When she thinks about the many years she worked as secretary to Harvey Headmaster Barry Fenstermacher, there is one moment that makes Julia Beck laugh.

“At one time, students would dunk him in the small pond behind his house! He actually had pictures of getting dunked that he put on the wall of his office.” There are many such memories for Beck, who retired last year after working with Fenstermacher from his first day on the job, 30 years ago.

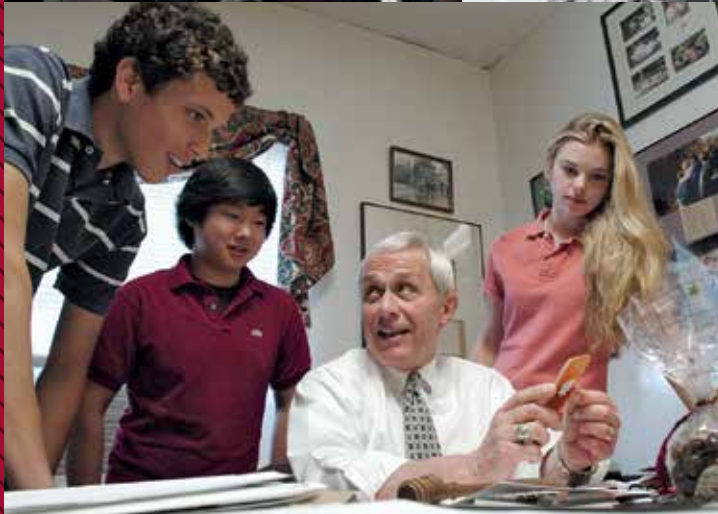


“I liked him immediately. He was down to earth, and you could speak to him about everything and anything.”

The headmaster's last year ends in June,

and he leaves a legacy of not only ushering Harvey into the 21st century, but of countless lasting impressions he has made on the Harvey community over the last three decades. Fenstermacher stories are endless, including how he got hired. Longtime board member Raymond Kuntz recalls how he chaired the committee to hire a headmaster to replace Harry Dawe, who had held the post from 1969 to 1984. (Tom Fulton was interim headmaster, 1985–1986.) “We engaged a consultant, vetted numerous résumés and interviewed a handful of candidates. We found someone we liked and offered him the job, but at the 12th hour the man had contract issues, and we were back to square one,” Kuntz says. He pushed the board to hire an assistant head, but they chose to interview only sitting heads. “I wanted someone who would stick with Harvey for the long run,” he adds. As it happened, a person on the committee worked at the Masters School in Dobbs Ferry and knew the then-assistant headmaster, Barry Fenstermacher. Kuntz and Fenstermacher met for lunch. “We spent a couple of hours together and I was convinced this was the guy who could take us through the next 25 years,” Kuntz says.





In the spring of 1986, Tim Stark, Harvey's former chair of languages and the school's athletic director, met Fenstermacher for the first time when he was being interviewed by the hiring committee. "He was questioned for hours about everything from his philosophy of education to the dress code," Stark remembers. "But Barry emerged from the inquisition full of energy and enthusiasm, eager to continue the conversation with those of us who stayed behind to learn more about him."

During those first days of the new leadership, one thing was clear: Harvey needed to be more financially stable, and that meant change. "When he started here, the school was poor, and he had quite a few things on his plate," says Beck. "Ultimately, he brought the school to where it is today."

For the new headmaster, quality education

was always the essential driving factor, as many colleagues, teachers and students can attest. Dick Wyland, assistant headmaster, was hired by Fenstermacher in 1993 as head of the Middle School. "Not only does he like to hire good people, but he gives them their head," says Wyland. "That means he doesn't micro manage, and he lets the faculty and staff do their thing and develop their own programs. But he always likes to be kept in the loop."

During his junior and senior years, KC Testwuide '11, an investor banker, remembers being on the student council and working with Fenstermacher. "He recruited very good teachers and allowed them to run their classes creatively, and setting their own structure that allowed them to teach comfortably. That speaks high volumes of him as a leader. I looked up to him, and the faculty also looked up to him. He's someone passionate about what he does," Testwuide says.

A favorite memory of Wyland's is Harvey's morning meeting, where Fenstermacher would address the entire school before the start of the school day. "Barry is a great raconteur, and his stories were always amusing, especially the ones you heard after school vacations," he says. Those morning stories also resonated with Nicole Wright '05, today an accomplished virtuoso violist who has played for The White House Correspondents Dinner. "He used to tell jokes and really funny stories at the morning meetings," Wright says. "One was about a friend of his who was so obsessed with conserving soap that he stored it in his freezer so it wouldn't

deteriorate so quickly. While it was quite funny, the way the headmaster told it, it was genius and absurd at the same time.” The morning meetings at Harvey were also special for Testwuide. “That’s when the headmaster had the most profound interactions with the student base,” he says.

Wyland holds a particularly poignant memory about the tragic morning of September 11 when Fenstermacher brought the whole school together into the study hall. “He had televisions set up and he talked to the kids, especially those whose parents worked in downtown Manhattan. He was instrumental in trying to locate those parents. His thoughtful presence and his suggestions enabled the school to get through it,” Wyland says.

Fenstermacher’s priority was being accessible to students.

Wright always found his office door open. “He would take time to speak with me, a boarding student whose parents weren’t around, as well as to the international students. You could go into his office at any time, and I knew if there was a problem with a teacher he was there to listen and to help,” she says.

In a vivid flashback, Wright recounts when Fenstermacher was going to sing at a holiday concert, and he asked her to accompany him on the violin: “I was so nervous, but also excited because he was such an accomplished singer. But he wasn’t nervous at all. He just seemed so happy and very comfortable performing in front of the entire student body and their families. Ultimately, he made me feel proud of myself.”

Up close and personal is Fenstermacher’s style, especially as a classroom teacher. “He taught a 20th-century film class and a religion class,” recalls Testwuide. “He also built an entire course around ‘Outliers,’ a book by Malcolm Gladwell, about high levels of success. In the classes I took with him, he was fair in how he handled students, but he was tough when he needed to be.” Fenstermacher let students know that school rules should never be broken. “I was too afraid to cut class



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—NICOLE WRIGHT '05





because you would get penalized," says Wright. "The second time cutting class got you suspended and the third time you were expelled. It was how the headmaster cared for our overall well-being." Stories abound about Fenstermacher's sense of humor. "Barry's most important attribute is that he has the ability to see the funny side of everything, no matter how serious the situation is," says Kuntz. Beck was usually the recipient of the headmaster's playful nature. "He liked to pull pranks on me," she recalls. "There was a family living in an apartment on campus, and the headmaster would tell the older child to sneak into the office and try to hit me in the knee with a certain toy. We all knew beforehand, and when the child came into the office, we'd all just laugh." Beck was equally playful. For one of his birthdays she baked him an angel food cake replete with inextinguishable candles.

Working with Fenstermacher was always a good mix of joking around and a lot of work, says Beck, who saw herself as the Headmaster's official gatekeeper. "Even though he had an open-door policy, the many people who wanted to see him throughout the day had to see me first. He used to say I was his daytime wife," she says.

The world of a headmaster is multi-tiered, and one needs to have his finger on the pulse of students, teachers, administrators, committee chairs and board members. Kuntz, who assumed the chairmanship of Harvey's board in 1988, marveled at how well-prepared Fenstermacher was for board meetings. "Barry would never just gather a few things for the meeting; he had an outline of what he wanted to say, which was more of a report that included his thoughts and a bit of brief history."

Kuntz, who for 25 years with his wife, Rose, watched the Super Bowl with Fenstermacher and his wife, Rowena, also acted as the school's pro bono attorney. "Barry has a quality that would endear him to any lawyer. He knows the right time to call an attorney is before any trouble starts," he says.

From his very first day, Stark says, "Barry had a clear-eyed vision of what he wanted to accomplish at Harvey, including the challenges of improving the school's finances, converting to a five-day boarding program, and transitioning from a school with only a handful of girls to one that was truly coeducational."

Notably, during his 30-year tenure as headmaster, there were major physical changes on Harvey's campus. The new

Walker Center for the Arts was completed in 2005, the new 27,000-square-foot Athletic Center in 2012, and the Middle School was enlarged by a third and remodeled. In 2015 the school added six tennis courts named for John G. Davis, class of 1950.

For Stark, the new gym demonstrated the importance of athletics: “Barry understood that the true value of athletics does not lie in the number of championships a school wins (although the Cavaliers have won many) or in the number of Division I athletes it produces. How many times have we heard Barry speak of the importance of participation and teamwork, of the acquisition of new skills and of sportsmanship?”

The 125-acre campus with its new buildings wasn’t just for Harvey. Integral to running the school was a close connection with the nearby communities of Katonah and the town of Bedford. Lee Roberts, former town supervisor and current town board member, appreciates the relationship the town had with Harvey. “Barry reached out in every way,” Roberts says. “He opened Harvey’s Evarts Ice Skating rink to the public and hosted the fireworks for the Katonah centennial in 1997 on Harvey’s field. It was fabulous.”



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Availing the Harvey campus grounds and buildings for public use garnered a strong community connection, says Roberts. “I’ve been on the Harvey campus for the inaugurations of their new buildings—the arts center and their gym. In fact, I held my farewell party as supervisor in the new gym and Harvey allowed us to use their staff and their kitchen. Ours was a connection that bolstered the community.” With Roberts’ consent, Fenstermacher arranged a student program of community service in Katonah. “For Barry, it was beyond just learning academics; it was learning about life and helping others. That’s an important part of education,” she says.





The Headmaster always made sure Roberts was included in key school events, including as a commencement speaker and judge at the 55th annual speech contest in 2013. “The poise the students had was most impressive,” Roberts recalls. She says her friendship with Fenstermacher was, and is, special. “He used to invite me to the Bedford Golf and Tennis Club for lunch, and we would chat about the current happenings in town, about children and what Harvey was up to. He is a true Renaissance man, and I so enjoyed his company. I always learned a lot from him,” she adds.

Fenstermacher’s ability to reach out and relate to everyone and anyone is what makes him a good manager, Wyland says. “Barry is a very good mentor and he’s able to take a broad look, a high-distance view of things. He would be the one saying, ‘Well, if you do this, you have to think about that.’ I’m down in the weeds with the day-to-day stuff, but he’s totally global-based,” Wyland says.

As Fenstermacher steps aside for a new head of school,

no one expects him to totally disappear. “In a recent conversation I had with Barry, it’s clear he will stay pretty involved in the school for the next few years,” says Testwuide. “I don’t think he’s riding off into the sunset for good.” Kuntz sees Fenstermacher as the “Headmaster Emeritus.” “That would require participation, and he wants it that way. But I do see him first making a clean break and then coming back. I’m sure he wants to give the new fellow a chance to find his footings.” Wright says she hopes Fenstermacher’s retirement will afford him more personal time. “He’s done so much for me, for the student body, and he was always so helpful. I hope now he has the time to really do all that he wants to do and all that he wants to accomplish.”

Stark’s parting message to Fenstermacher is one of great respect and admiration. “I have no illusions about where Harvey might be today if not for Barry’s stable and forward-looking leadership,” he says. “It is my fondest wish that Rowena and Barry enjoy their next life challenge together with a well-deserved sense of satisfaction in what they have achieved for The Harvey School. May the school’s new leadership continue to add to the strong foundation built during the Fenstermacher years!” **H**