In Memory of Alfred Davis: A man and a piano

By Robert Barlow, staff writer
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The flag at Rochester Institute of Technology was lowered to half-staff on May 29 in memory of Alfred L. Davis, who was affectionately known on campus as “Mr. RIT” because of his 70 years of service to the university.

Mr. Davis, of Brighton, passed away May 28 at the age of 92.

"Al Davis had an unequaled impact on this university," said RIT President Bill Destler. “His contributions to RIT have been exceptional and will be felt for generations to come.”

Born in 1916 in Boulder, Colo., Mr. Davis earned a bachelor’s degree from Salem (N.C.) College, then a master’s degree from Syracuse University in 1938.

After college, he joined RIT as an instructor in the general education department, teaching until 1941, when he began working as chief inspector for the instrument division for Bausch & Lomb. During his time there, he spent five years as president of the Rochester Society for Quality Control and was a founding member of the American Society of Quality Control.

Mr. Davis returned to RIT on a full-time basis in 1945, serving as associate director of the evening division. He held that position until 1951, when he was named director of public relations, a position he held until his promotion to vice president for development and public relations in 1960. He held that post until 1970, when he became administrative secretary to RIT’s board of trustees. He was again named vice president in 1980.

The contributions Mr. Davis made to RIT can be seen throughout the campus. He also played a key role in helping raise the $65 million needed to relocate from downtown to the Henrietta campus.

His support also made it possible for RIT to build a new childcare facility — Margaret’s House — which was named after his late wife, Margaret Welcher Davis. In 2004, as a gesture of thanks, RIT’s Student Alumni Union cafeteria was renamed the Alfred L. Davis room.

Mr. Davis was also active in the Rochester community, having served on the board of directors of Rochester General Hospital and as director of the Hillside Children’s Center, the Rochester Chamber of Commerce and the Advertising Council of Rochester. He was also extensively involved with the Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra and was a benefactor of the organization.
“I feel his loss very keenly — we all do,” said RPO Music Director Christopher Seaman. “He was someone who truly loved the orchestra, loved music, and saw it as his mission to enable us to turn our dreams into reality. Al was not an attention-seeker; he was a real gentleman and a wonderful example of someone whose heart is in the right place. His integrity was matched by his extraordinary generosity.”

Through the RPO Steinway Piano Fund, Mr. Davis made it possible for the RPO to replace its 12-year-old Steinway concert grand piano, which was in desperate need of a complete overhaul or replacement.

“On behalf of the entire RPO family, we are all grateful to have known Al Davis and to have received the benefits of his generosity,” said Seaman. “We cherish his memory as a true example of humanity.”

A memorial service for Mr. Davis is planned for 2 p.m. Saturday, June 21 in the Schmitt Interfaith Center on the RIT campus. Memorial contributions can be made to First Baptist Church, 175 Allens Creek Road, Rochester, NY 14618; Rochester Philharmonic, Development Office, 108 East Ave., Rochester, NY 14604; or Margaret’s House at RIT, 112 Lomb Memorial Drive, Rochester, NY 14623.

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