

Remmers Lecture Series is the Talk of the Town

When Walter Remmers, MetE'23, talks about the old days, he describes the campus in monastic terms. It was a "cloistered" place, a closely-knit, isolated community of men. Students had little communication with the world beyond Rolla. Radios were rare; cars were even rarer. "You got off the train at Rolla in August," Remmers says, "and you didn't go home until Christmas."

Conditions were ideal for churning out fine engineers, says Remmers, a retired Union Carbide executive who now owns a cattle ranch near St. James, Mo. But it left many graduates unschooled in the social graces they would later need to function in polite society.

"When I was a student," Remmers says, "the graduates left the campus as well-trained, well-educated engineers. But when it came to the rest of the world, they were a bunch of country bumpkins." As were some faculty members. Remmers recalls one professor who attended a black-tie affair in all the proper attire — except for his shoes. "He had on a pair of the yellowest bricklayer's boots you'd ever seen," Remmers says.

This lack of refinement led Remmers and his wife Miriam to sponsor an annual lecture series on campus that would expose students to prominent world leaders and decision-makers. Today the Remmers Special Artist/Lecture Series is one of the most popular events on campus. The series has brought luminaries to campus every year since 1979, when former President Gerald Ford was the series' inaugural

speaker. Other guest lecturers and performers include former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, ex-U.N. Ambassador Jeane Kirkpatrick, TV commentator Charles Kuralt, violinist Shlomo Mintz, opera diva Anna Moffo and pianist Leonard Pennario, who has appeared twice. The most recent lecturer, former Surgeon General C. Everett Koop, spoke in January (see "Campus News," February 1993).

Remmers' generosity in creating the lecture series was one reason the campus honored him with the Chancellor's Medal at spring commencement — on the 70th anniversary of his graduation and one day after his 90th birthday.

The idea for the lecture series was conceived as the Remmerses were driving to campus from their Tucson, Ariz., home. "I was telling Miriam about the need for some kind of humanistic program to supplement students' rigorous technical studies," Remmers says. He thought it might be a good idea to sponsor a lecture series that would bring world leaders to the campus. "But Miriam, being very much interested in music" — she studied piano at Wellesley and Mount Holyoke colleges in Massachusetts — "got in her part and said, 'Not only speakers, but also musicians.'"

Although the campus and the people of Rolla may know him best for the lecture series, Remmers has made a name for himself in business as well. His career began in metallurgy, then switched to sales before leading to upper management and corporate leadership.



Remmers participated and held patents in the manufacture of magnetic materials for some important developments such as the loading coils that made transcontinental telephone service possible. He also worked on the development of magnetic parts for "movietone," the process by which soundtracks were put directly on the movie film.

Remmers started at the U.S. Bureau of Mines' Rolla Research Center, where he worked while pursuing his master's degree. He then joined the mechanical engineering faculty at Washington University in St. Louis and in 1929 joined Western Electric Co.'s Hawthorne Works in Cicero, Ill., as a metallurgist. There he worked on a variety of applied-research projects. Remmers participated and held patents in the manufacture of mag-

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In the late 1930s, Remmers became a salesman for Union Carbide Corp.'s mining and metallurgy division. He rose through the ranks to become president of two

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Union Carbide subsidiaries, Electro Metallurgical Co. and U.S. Vanadium Corp., in 1948, and ultimately becoming vice president of the parent Union Carbide. That same year, Remmers received an honorary doctorate from the University of Missouri during MSM commencement exercises. (At that time, MSM could not bestow honorary doctorates, so UM President Frederick Middlebush performed the honor. "The only claim to fame that I have," says Remmers, "is that the University of Missouri granted me a doctoral degree two years before they did Harry Truman.")

Remmers retired from Union Carbide in 1958, but remained active as a cattle rancher and a consultant to business and educational institutions.

"I like education," he says. "I've been involved in education all my life. I probably would have stayed in teaching if I had been able to make a little more money at it."

Remmers thinks UMR's strength lies mainly in its "tremendous reputation" and its good economic value. "I don't know of any other college or university in the United States where you can get as much for your money as you can here," he says.

He also has fond memories of the MSM faculty.

"The men on the faculty were demanding," he says. "They would work the pants off you. But they were the type of men for whom you would want to do more than what was required. They instilled a desire to work hard."

That work ethic was perhaps the most valuable lesson Remmers learned while on the cloistered campus of MSM.

"When I started here I had a better high school education than most freshmen, but I didn't work," he says. That led to a professor's calling him "the laziest man in school" — an experience "that got me started working, and I've been working ever since." ■