



**Wharton County
Junior College**

NEWS RELEASE

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END OF AN ERA

Carolan retires from WCJC after 56 years of teaching

WHARTON, TEXAS – After 56 years of teaching, Jim Carolan is retiring from Wharton County Junior College. Leaving behind the institution he's loved so dearly won't be easy.

"It's like getting divorced or losing your best friend," Carolan said of his retirement, which took effect earlier this summer. "This was such a great job that I always said they would have to carry me out."

Over the past half century, Carolan, 83, has become a virtual icon at the college. From teaching finance classes to coaching girls' basketball teams to founding various college organizations, Carolan has helped shape WCJC's destiny. His impact has been staggering. An estimated 20,000 students have at one time or another sat in his classroom.

"There's not a place I go where a former student doesn't come up to me to say hello," Carolan said.

Carolan's bond with his students is near legendary, said Gloria Crockett, Director of WCJC's Bay City Campus. Like many college employees, Crockett took one of Carolan's mathematics courses early in her educational career and was amazed at his ability to connect with the class.

"He had a unique gift of teaching math in such a way that students could understand it," Crockett recalled. "He never seemed to be in a hurry and would take time with students and teach them in a way that was never condescending. He was always an encourager."

WCJC President Betty McCrohan was equally impressed with Carolan's dedication to his students.

"Mr. Carolan has an exceptional knack for explaining difficult concepts in a way that's easy to comprehend," McCrohan said. "He takes his role as teacher very seriously and has an unwavering commitment to his students. Over the years he has been a wonderful asset and we will miss him here on campus."

Crockett noted that Carolan's retirement represents the end of an era. In some cases, he taught three generations of the same family.

“Mr. Carolan has been a consistent and loyal supporter of WCJC for a long, long time,” she said. “His interaction with and respect for students and staff has been an example to learn from. His presence will be missed by the entire WCJC family.”

Born in Philadelphia, Pa., on July 4, 1932, Carolan was the youngest of six siblings. His parents were the offspring of Irish immigrants and never had an education of their own. Carolan and his siblings lived through the Great Depression, learning how to scrape out an existence from meager circumstances.

“I remember we had to eat dandelions at one point,” Carolan recalls.

Athletics became Carolan’s outlet, and with a natural tenacity and desire for achievement he quickly grew into an accomplished competitor. Following high school graduation, he headed to Texas to play basketball for Tyler Junior College. After transferring to other colleges, he finally settled on Texas Wesleyan.

It was there that he met his wife, Lillian. The couple has been married for 59 years.

“It took three years of convincing to get her to marry me,” Carolan says with a smile.

At Texas Wesleyan, Carolan obtained a bachelor’s degree in accounting (with a minor in Spanish) and a master’s degree in education (with a minor in mathematics). He initially used his education to coach in the Fort Worth area.

In 1959, he came to Wharton. Lillian, a Lane City native, had wanted to return to the area for some time and Carolan found an opening at WCJC as a history teacher. The college at that time was comprised of a handful of buildings and had a total faculty of only 34 teachers.

“It was like a family here,” Carolan recalls.

Over the years, Carolan branched out to teach other subjects, including accounting, Spanish, industrial vocation and mathematics. It’s the latter that he’s the most well-known for. With his easygoing manner and avant-garde style, Carolan became a favorite among students as well as faculty. In addition to his core mathematics classes – which were frequently filled to capacity – Carolan regularly offered business and finance-based night classes for adults who needed advice on such things as investing.

WCJC Athletic Director Gene Bahnsen began his career at the college just one month prior to Carolan and said the math teacher was a whiz with numbers and had a penchant for smart investing.

“I took one of his night classes and still remember what he taught,” Bahnsen said. “Jim has this ability of being able to apply math to life. He’s one of my closest friends and he’s touched a lot of lives.”

As two of the longest tenured faculty members at the college, Carolan and Bahnsen have shared a particularly close friendship as well as a friendly rivalry. Both men laugh when talking about their “contest” to see who could stay at the college the longest before retiring.

Were it not for a recent health issue, Carolan says he likely would have delayed his retirement.

“I loved this school, the teachers, the administration and the students,” he said. “Everything I have I owe to this college.”

Carolan has remained a life-long believer in the benefits of attending junior college, sending all three of his kids through WCJC. When asked what kept him in the classroom for so long, he said the answer is simple – the students.

“I think I thought those kids needed me and I really wanted to help them,” he said. “I want to give WCJC the credit for keeping me. It was such a privilege to teach those kids.”

As for his retirement, Carolan doesn’t anticipate doing a lot of golfing or traveling. His plans at the moment are to stay local and redefine his relationship with the institution he has loved for so much of his life. In particular, he intends to remain a WCJC ambassador-at-large – promoting the college throughout the region – for as long as possible.

“If I can help students by tutoring or providing some other service, I will,” he said. “I’m not done with Wharton County Junior College.”

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