

Two decades of history with Blakey

By Mike Moffett
New Voice managing editor

"We were just a group of people who taught classes."

George Blakey, the ultra-respected and near-legendary Indiana University East history professor, remembering the days prior to IU East becoming an official institution.

And even when it did, in the summer of 1971, things were much different than as we know them now.

Blakey, who began teaching at the then Eastern Indiana Center in 1967, recalled IU East's third-foot status, being a tenant at Earlham in East's first year of '71-72.

"We were renting space at Earlham. It was becoming increasingly crowded. We had offices that were spread around, and we doubled up. My office was in the basement...it was eye level to a parking lot."

All classes were held in the evenings. IU East was strictly a nocturnal college.

"I don't remember anything about the days," Blakey said, adding that "all

'We were just a group of people who taught classes.'
-- Prof. George Blakey

activities were on the weekends."

In spite of the fact that IU East now had a name, its own identity didn't emerge right along with it. The fledgling school still sat inconspicuously under the tarpaulin of Earlham.

"Our bookstore was tucked into Earlham's; our identity was closely interwoven with Earlham," Blakey noted. Still, it wasn't entirely stifling. "We had access to that wonderful library."

The first school year of '71-72, IU East, by the numbers, looked like this: 700 students; 11 full-time faculty; and 21 in its first graduating class in '72. Surprisingly perhaps, three members of that 11-member faculty are still around today: David Fulton, now vice chancellor, Fred Grohsmeyer, and Blakey.

While the small numbers might have rendered a false sense of an inferiority

complex, that certain close-knit feeling can only come when all faces are familiar ones.

"Being much smaller we had a closer sense of camaraderie," Blakey recalled with mixed emotions. "We don't have that any more — we've gotten big," he said with a laugh.

In those early days, IU East had a basketball team, which competed on the collegiate level and was a unifying activity for the entire IU East family, similar to Indiana towns rallying around their high school teams.

"It was crazy when we had our games," Blakey exclaimed, which were held, but where else, at Earlham's Trueblood Fieldhouse.

"We had a pep band and cheerleaders, and a lot of the faculty and staff would go to the games on Friday night — we knew everyone. We never had a winning season, and it was a little ragged around the edges, but we had a lot of fun."

And while the main campus in Bloomington had just recently hired a little-known coach by the name of Knight,

See BLAKEY Page 2

Blakey

Continued from Page 1

IU East was forced to improvise and finagled anyone it could to coach the Pioneers.

"An admissions director was coach once, and an English instructor served as an assistant," Blakey said of the coaching anachronisms.

Blakey also recalled a student-faculty tennis tournament in which he played an uncharacteristically passive role.

"I was playing doubles with David Fulton; he was a super tennis player. I just stood there and watched him beat the students," laughed Blakey.

Fun times may have abounded and close friendships easily made, but IU East remained an awkward passenger on Earlham's educational wheels.

"There were cultural differences. Our students were older and had family. It was their (Earlham's) campus and we were renting. We looked forward to the day when we had our own building."

That day of emancipation from Earlham finally came. Construction of the building began in the latter part of '72, and in December 1974, IU East had its own home. The euphoria surrounding the move was infectious.

"It was really very exciting and gratifying to know you personally could shape future classes and degree programs," he said. "The professors chose the list of books that they wanted in the library. It was wonderful to come here. We had loads of future. It's always inspiring to have your own identity."

For a brief period in the mid-1970s, IU East classes — four to be exact — could be taken via television. With the arrival of cable television in 1973, IU East hooked up with the cable industry and, in the process, became a more visible entity in the Richmond community. After buying their books, students only had to come to the campus twice a semester to take tests. People who weren't students were watching the classes too. As a result, some professors were high-profile figures in the area.

"I'd be walking down the street and have people come up to me and say 'I see you teaching class on TV,'" Blakey said, who discovered his new-found notoriety was not easily dampened. "I was swimming at the Y when I literally bumped into someone under water," he recounted. "When we both came up at the same time the first thing he said to me was 'I see you on TV.' We were now being recognized as a campus doing something."

Blakey says one of the reasons IU East has seen such a surge in enrollment is because of keeping students — and not necessarily because of a larger amount of new students — whereas before, their stay may have been quite short before heading elsewhere.

"We're holding onto the new students. Used to be we'd get them and lose them, get them and lose them. We lost a lot by attrition. The growth now is not that

surprising. That's because we have more courses and more baccalaureate degrees."

In its infancy IU East was comprised equally of male and female students. Today, women outnumber the men by a sizable margin. That ratio mirrors nationwide statistics. And back in the early '70s, older, non-traditional students were the dominant group at East, but the gap has been closing in recent years. Blakey sees that as a positive shift.

"With more daytime classes and more baccalaureate degrees we're getting more and more traditional students, and that's how it should be," he said. "But I hope we never lose the older students. The mix can be a wonderful educational experience."

Blakey says IU East can hold its own with most schools in providing a quality education. He cites an outstanding staff and points out that the community now looks to IU East for assistance in various civic affairs.

"I have a great deal of respect for our English faculty," he said. And our nursing program is one of the best. In this region they supply more nurses than any other program. They also have one of the highest success rates in Indiana in passing state exams. Our education program is young, but it is also first-rate. Those are the areas that don't require excellent facilities. The biology department is limited by what it can do. We don't promise what we can't deliver. When our facilities improve, that department will be top-notch too. We're turning out professionals in the community. I have full confidence our students have received a strong education when they do get out.

"The community didn't used to contact us for anything," Blakey continued. "We're (IU East) now the host for the Area 9 agency on aging. With a graying population that's a big thing. The Richmond Chamber of Commerce recently asked David Chandler (management professor) to do a study on business in the downtown area. This shows the community is looking to us more and more concerning what goes on in the city."

It may well be that IU East presents the best of both worlds, in that it is now large enough to accommodate more and more students with different degree objectives but not be too large that it can't still deal with students on a personal level. Informal or formal talks can easily be arranged with highly accessible professors. A student's name still supercedes his social security number in the classroom.

"I'm always amused when a student comes here from a large school, say IU, who, on his blue book, writes his or her social security number. I don't ask them to write their social security number," Blakey dryly said. "I know all my students by their first names."

"Sure IU-Bloomington has many more resources. But if you're an 18-year-old going in you're going to be in a class that has 400 students. For three years your classes may be taught by graduate

students. That's not to say graduate students are no good. But it's much easier to fall through a crack and never be found. Here we boost a student. If you have problems we assist."

The IU East that is known today could not have been without the effort put forth by the many contributors and supporters, the large ones as well as the smaller ones. The white tiles that decorate the walls outside the library contain the names of people who kicked-in a dollar a week for three years, with the money being

Birth

Continued from page 1

school of continuing studies, and nursing were implemented. The first two-year associate degrees for IU East — designed and started by Dr. Grohsmeyer — were given by Earlham.

In December of 1974, IU East moved into its new home, and the first registration was held in this building in January of '75. More organization — which wasn't possible with the limited space at Earlham — was begun, and divisions and departments began to emerge.

After having had previous commencements at Earlham (1972) and the First Presbyterian Church of Richmond (1973-74), graduations began taking place in Vivian Auditorium in 1975. But enrollment has expanded so much that in 1989, commencement was held in the Kuhlman Center at Richmond's 4H fairgrounds.

Contribute

Continued from Page 1

was based on a study that, through interviews with 85 area businesses, professional and industry leaders, showed that a total of \$1 million to \$1.25 million could be raised for the building over a three-year period starting in early 1970.

The proceeds from the drive enabled college to get the project off the ground by buying land and starting to make plans. The funds also provided "seed money" that served as proof of community support when the college applied for state and federal grants for construction.

Many of the contributions came through employee pledges from local businesses. The pledge plan, called The Employee Dividend (in-plant) Solicitation, succeeded at Avco, Alcoa, the *Graphic*, Second National Bank, Hothouse Furniture, First National Bank, *The Palladium-Item*, and Vivian Buick.

One form of incentive in the campaign was the opportunity to purchase memorial signature tiles. These personalized tiles were offered to the employees and members of the community with the option to pay for them over a three year period. The buyer's signature, in his/her handwriting, was baked into the tile and the tiles were then placed together as part of the wall on either side of the school library where they will endure for the life of the building.

withheld from their weekly paychecks. They belonged to a group that was called the Assembly Line Institution. The dedication of the building in 1975 may be Blakey's fondest IU East memory over the last 20 years, and certainly one of the most poignant.

"Dedication day was held during the worst rainstorm we've ever had," Blakey said. They came anyway just to put their fingers on the tiles. People still come in here and show their kids the tiles and say 'I helped build this place.' And they did."

"We've progressed very well," said Grohsmeyer. "We're in dire need of space and more full-time faculty now. But not so much full-time faculty that we edge out out adjunct faculty. Our adjuncts are out in the community and they add a richness and fullness to the education that we can offer at the university."

Grohsmeyer feels that IU East still needs more space, even with the new building. "We've got just as many [IU] classes being taught at Earlham today as we did when we broke off from them and branched out on our own."

Grohsmeyer also feels we need a maximum of a half-dozen more bachelor's programs. But despite these drawbacks, Grohsmeyer is pleased that people are getting more involved and that IU East is now a four-year college. "Our greatest strength is that the faculty and staff we have work closely with the students. It's very gratifying to realize the progress we've made."

FACT BOX

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Through the outstanding efforts made by those involved in the campaign, both from the leaders of the campaign and the citizens in the community, a total of \$1,205,646 was raised. This community spirit seems to have grown every year in support of IU East not only financially, but also by campus enrollment, which peaked in 1991 at 1931 students.