Dero Downing – Congressional Record

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It’s been nearly two months since WKU’s fourth president, Dero Downing, died at the age of 89.

In this week’s View from the Hill, Amy Bingham talks to his widow Harriet about the overwhelming outpouring of love and friendship the Downing family has received.

He is the namesake of WKU’s student union, the Downing University Center, which opened in 1970. But Dero Downing’s legacy spans far beyond his beloved campus.

“Everyone has a story about Dero.”

Harriet and Dero Downing were married for 67 and ½ years. And they dated for two before that.

“I met him in front of Potter hall, was introduced to him, had a date with him the next night and that was about four days after I got on campus.”

And so began a union that kept them close to their alma mater for next seven decades.

“From the time we got back after WWII, Western was our life and we’ve been blessed with so many friends and experiences that we’ve had.”

Downing enlisted in the U.S. Navy shortly after graduating from WKU in 1943.

“His footprints are actually on the beaches of Normandy, he was in the D-Day invasion. Just a remarkable life.”

A remarkable life that included stints as teacher, coach and eventually president of Western Kentucky University.

“If he dug ditches, he would try to dig deeper and dig wider than anyone else.”

Downing served as WKU president from 1969 until 1979. From there he became president of the College Heights Foundation, a position currently held by his son Alex Downing.

“I think he was the most appreciative person that I ever knew. He was always grateful for the opportunity and blessings he’d been given.”

A tribute to Dr. Downing was recently entered into the Congressional Record by U.S. Congressman and Downing family friend Brett Guthrie.

“Obviously Dr. Downing was a great citizen of Kentucky, a great citizen of Bowling Green, his imprint is everywhere.”

But Mrs. Downing says her husband was always more interested in others who’se path he crossed, and he would be humbled by all the attention.

“Here again he would say why in the world are they making such a fuss over me?”

Whether it’s a story about how he helped them park a car in front of his building, or corrected them in a way that impacted their lives, the Downings say they’ve been truly touched by each and every story that’s been shared with them.

With this week’s View from the Hill, I’m Amy Bingham.