



Southerner Armstrong's hospitality remains warm

By Gail Stork

Nebraska has faded his southern accent and converted him to Big Red allegiance, but Richard Armstrong, UNL vice chancellor for student affairs, said he still is loyal to the South where he was born, educated and employed before coming to UNL.

His southern accent still is noticeable, but Armstrong said compared with his wife, he has no accent at all.

The legendary southern hospitality also is intact in Armstrong after five years at UNL. Some of it leaks out in the easy speech and calm gestures of the 46-year-old administrator.

Armstrong said the lack of southern warmth in Nebraska's people and its weather were two difficult adjustments he and his family had to make when he left his position in 1972 as housing director at Georgia University, Athens, Ga.

But after 4 years in the same position at UNL and nearly a year as vice chancellor, Armstrong said he thinks Nebraskans are more genuinely warm and not just living up to a reputation.

The adjustment required by his promotion last year took much less time than the two years spent getting used to sub-zero temperatures and snow, Armstrong said.

Armstrong's job is providing leadership for divisions of student services—University Health Center, Multi-Cultural Affairs, Nebraska Unions, Housing and office of the Dean of Students—although he said it isn't as structured as it sounds.

"I would hope there are students sprinkled all through the system," he said. He deals primarily with student leaders and problems students cannot solve through usual channels.

When there is no student traffic in his large, uncluttered office, Armstrong said he takes care of the paperwork which, according to a new year's resolution, he plans to dispense with quicker and more efficiently.

Armstrong said he often works longer than the normal 8-to-5 day of an administrator because a student's day is longer than that. His schedule evokes an occasional "When is dad coming home

tonight?" from his children—Synda, 10, and Richard, 8.

Even when he is home, Armstrong said he is occupied with Business that does not mix with children, so vacations are the only time the family is really together.

The word "family" produced an enthused smile and full description of Armstrong's family, whose support he said is crucial to his job.

In another new year's resolution, Armstrong promised his family a vacation that was not connected with any convention, conference or business trip.

His wife, Marinall, works part-time researching the needs of the deaf, besides playing tennis whenever her schedule permits.

Armstrong said when his wife can convince him to play tennis too, he gets physically exhausted. But "when the weather is decent" working outside is his therapy.

"I can get myself back together by tilling the soil, watering plants . . . even mowing the lawn," he said. "That, and taking a shower, help me get perspective."

However, Armstrong said he can't leave problems at the office.

"Being physically relaxed doesn't mean I don't have the same thoughts I had all day," he said.

The army reserve has taken up two weeks of each of Armstrong's years since his participation in ROTC in college at Auburn. He referred to it as his second vocation.

Both of Armstrong's vocations include people. He said being at ease with people and understanding them are traits a college supervisor recognized in him, convincing him to go into administration.

"I really enjoy establishing friendships that weather time," he said. "I enjoy seeing young staff members overcome their first frustrations and mature professionally. It's very rewarding."

Armstrong's zest for people is a part of his southern hospitality that has survived the bite of Nebraskan winters to become a genuine Nebraskan warmth.

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