

## 1971–1980: The Mayer Years

By Spencer Elliott

There was not much to envy about Richard S. Mayer's situation as new dean of the College of Engineering in 1971. He assumed a position through which several others had been shuffled during the years preceding. Ohio University had been forced to shut down briefly just a year before. Mayer's College was facing severe budget problems. And soon, there would be talk of eliminating it altogether.

"Circumstances of the University were grave," President Emeritus Charles Ping recalls. "But it was a campus rich in people."

It was also a campus of fewer people. Social upheaval in the wake of the Kent State shootings had led to a major drop in enrollment, leaving the University cash-strapped and forced to make difficult financial decisions. The College of Engineering was a target for cutbacks, and some University administrators had even proposed the program be discontinued entirely, much to the consternation of those within.

"The battles at that time were about budgets," says Nick Dinos, professor emeritus of chemical engineering. "Dick had to deal with a lot of hostility."

Paul Stocker, B.S.E.E. '26, HON '74, then a Russ College board member, would eventually write to the Board of Trustees in 1974 expressing his discontent.

Though the College would lose much of its non-tenured faculty, Dick McFarland, B.S. '50, director emeritus of the Avionics Engineering Center, notes that Mayer kept the ship afloat with what he had.

"He was in the trenches, trying to do more with less," McFarland says.

Weathering the storm of those turbulent years, Mayer saw to it that the College of Engineering not only survived—he helped lay the groundwork that would help it thrive.

"Dick managed to hold the College together and on task during difficult years," says Ping.

But Mayer downplays his role.

"You have to take some wise action. It's not a dream world, it's a real world," he says. "You realize the whole University has a problem, even if your share is disproportionately large," he notes.



Dean Emeritus Richard S. Mayer

One of Mayer's major contributions was bringing others onboard as champions of the College. Early in his career, Mayer revived the College's Board of Visitors and was instrumental—over breakfast with Dolores in 1973—in recruiting Fritz Russ, B.S.E.E. '42, HON '75, into active engagement with the College that now bears their name.

Ping notes that Mayer's effort to bring Russ into the fold "was only a beginning." Case in point: During the last year of Mayer's tenure as dean, Paul and Beth Stocker gave an \$8 million endowment, the largest gift to Ohio University at the time. It was used to transform Crook Hall, a dormitory, into today's Stocker Center. Mayer recalls that even when the College of Engineering was in dire straits, as dean, he tried to look beyond short-term budget problems.

"It was a matter of trying to impress on people that the future of the College was an important part of what the University should be in the future," he said.

Those days might have held no shortage of issues with faculty and administration, but Dinos says Mayer also kept a great sense of responsibility to the students.

"Dick Mayer always kept that in mind—that we're teachers," Dinos says. "Dick is, I think, a seminal figure in the modern history of Ohio University." 🙏

