

PROFILE: MARAVENE LOESCHKE

This president keeps pep in step

By Gary Brown

Most NCAA schools have a nickname, a mascot and a pep band to support their athletics teams. Few, however – perhaps only one – feature a president in that crowd.

Maravene Loeschke may not be Mansfield's mascot, but she is a persistent percussionist. Go to a Mansfield sporting event where the 40-piece Mountie Sound Machine is revving up the home crowd, and odds are you'll see the former theater major keeping the beat.

How did it happen?

"I walked over during a basketball game and started playing with them," said the three-year leader of the 3,350-student Division II university in Mansfield, Pennsylvania. "I was over there saying hello to them and to the cheerleaders as I always do, and the band started to play, and there was a tambourine sitting there, so I picked it up and started playing to the beat. And then afterward, I apologized to the band leader for playing and he said, 'Are you kidding me? I think this is fantastic!'"

Nowadays, if Loeschke doesn't come over, they come get her.

"This year they advanced me to bongos," she said laughing. "I don't have the slightest idea what I'm doing with them. As a matter of fact the band director said once, 'You know, as a bongo player, you really are a great dancer.' I guess that's because I wiggle around a lot when I play."

Loeschke (pronounced LUSH-key) has also marched with the school's marching band and danced with the dance team. It's no publicity stunt, either. She does it because she genuinely supports her school's athletics teams – a characteristic she has displayed at previous stops at Division I Towson (provost) and Division III Wilkes (dean).

Not surprisingly, given her background, Loeschke feels similarly about the arts. When she was a dean of fine arts at Towson, in fact, one of the first things she wanted to accomplish was to tie fine arts and athletics.

"They were right across the street from each other, and there were so many similarities," she said. "The theater majors had to rehearse in the evenings, and athletes had to practice at the same time. And both were usually away on weekends, and they had phenomenal work ethics. Both balance mind and body and spirit. So we advertised each other's programs at each other's productions or games. And we developed an athletics dance team that didn't have a home, so we put it in



With a background in theater, Mansfield President Maravene Loeschke is accustomed to performing. Now she's a fixture in the school's pep band at basketball games.

fine arts – little things like that.”

Loeschke said the arts and athletics are essential to the education of the whole person. Even though athletics aren’t academically based, she said, that doesn’t mean they shouldn’t be an integral part of the academic program. “And frequently, even though the arts are academically based, they are sometimes considered an extracurricular activity. Yet without those two dimensions I don’t think you educate the whole person,” Loeschke said.

She also said that because of her theater background, people often assume she’s not concerned about athletics.

“But while I never participated in athletics my whole life, I still have a healthy respect for what it takes to be an athlete – it’s almost identical to what it takes to be a good actor,” she said. “There are few other majors and

courses you can pursue in which you have to study on a bus, or stop painting scenery to go study for a test. To balance all of that, art majors and student-athletes have to develop personal and professional skills. Both sets have to develop their bodies, as well – then there’s the teamwork part of it, too. You can’t do a play by yourself, even if it’s a one-woman show.”

Loeschke said she tries not to miss a game in any sport. “If I am on campus and not mandated to be at a meeting, I’m at all the games,” she said. “Now I don’t need a medal for that – I enjoy it. To me, that’s one of the best parts of the job. I go see the plays, too, of course, but with them you go see them for a weekend and you’re done – there are a lot more games!”

Now that’s a beat everyone can follow.

LOESCHKE LOVES LEADERSHIP

Mansfield President Maravene Loeschke is serious about the school’s branding tag line, which is “Developing Tomorrow’s Leaders.”

“That’s not just a billboard to us,” she said.

Apparently not. The university curriculum features a minor in leadership, a master’s program in leadership, and a “Mountaineer leadership program” that students can participate in as an extra-curricular activity.

“We really believe that part of our mission at Mansfield is that at whatever level we may contribute – small as we may be – in developing tomorrow’s leaders, we need to develop that whole person,” Loeschke said. “And since we believe that athletics is integral to the rest of the university, the athletics department wants to have a track in the Mountaineer leadership program.”

That means team captains and student coaches and other volunteers can develop some of their leadership skills in athletics specifically – earning a letter in leadership. Once athletics made its appearance in the program, other campus areas followed, such as student government and residence halls.

“When it’s all said and done, we’re going to have an incredibly robust noncurricular leadership-development program that students can take by simply applying it to their passion,” Loeschke said.

– Gary Brown



Maravene Loeschke bio

POSITION: President at Mansfield in Mansfield, Pennsylvania, since May 2006.

PREVIOUS JOBS: Provost at Wilkes for four years; spent 30 years in administration at Towson, including as dean of the College of Fine Arts and Communication; began her academic career as an instructor in Towson’s theater department in 1970.

EDUCATION: Earned a bachelor of science in theater and English and a master’s degree in education from Towson; received her Ph.D. from The Union Institute in Cincinnati.

WHAT YOU DIDN’T KNOW: Loeschke has published numerous books, articles and papers, as well as three plays. She has acted professionally on both stage and television and directed a number of plays.