

# New Wagner optimism credited to Smith

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Wagner College's new president, Norman R. Smith, seems to have taken the Grymes Hill campus by storm and sparked an infectious optimism about the school's ability to rout the financial problems that have beset it for the past several years.

An informal survey of faculty, non-teaching staff and students over the past three months shows a complete elimination of the air of pessimism that pervaded the 106-year-old school at the end of the 1987-88 school year. Student leaders and professors then not only questioned the school's leadership, but whether the school would survive.

Smith has also served as a healer, drawing together factions that only last year were fighting bitterly as the school went through a turbulent search for a new president.

In interview after interview, Smith was singled out as the cause of the sudden burst of hope and commitment energizing the campus.

Egon Wendel, chairman of the school's education department said "there's no doubt" that the changed atmosphere was emanating directly from the president.

Smith, he said, has spread "a lot of good will" on the campus.

According to Wendel, Smith was keeping the faculty fully "aware of what's going on in the administration."

C. Carlyle Haaland, the school's former vice president for academic affairs, who had served as provost and chief executive for the year the college was without a president, had been criticized for his inaccessibility and for failing to involve faculty and students in the decision-making process.

Haaland, who resigned shortly after Smith was selected, had been considered to have the inside

track on the job. His candidacy for the college's presidency was strongly supported by some professors while vehemently opposed by others.

Dr. Eleanor Rogg, the acting vice president for academic affairs, said Smith more than makes himself available for faculty and student input, he seeks it out.

"He's almost never in his office," she said. "He's out walking around the campus, stopping people and talking to them."

Student government association president Joseph Watson said he had seen Smith stop students to simply ask their names and find out if they were satisfied with the school's new food service or their dormitory accommodations.

This concern with what others think and feel about the college, Ms. Rogg said, has released a current of energy as everyone pitches in to help the school.

During recent renovations of the Wagner dorms, a focal point of student complaints about the school last year, school adminis-

trators were seen splashing paint on the walls while contractors installed new tile in the showers in order to meet tight deadlines.

"It was like a dam burst," she said. "Everyone had ideas that just came pouring out."

But at the same time, she said, Smith was not garnering the same reputation as Sam Frank, who was well liked but considered by some to be an ineffectual executive.

"He challenges us," she said.

An example of the demands placed on the staff came at the outset of Smith's official tenure in July when he ordered the massive rehabilitation of all areas used by students within 80 days.

Student government president Watson said the efforts to improve student housing were immediately noticed — and appreciated.

One faculty member told of yet another angle. He was told Smith wanted to meet with him, so he suggested 11 a.m. "Oh," he was told, "that's when he will be fund-



Norman R. Smith

raising on Wall Street." A time shortly after lunch was arranged.

Smith also appointed two faculty members — Ms. Rogg, who

headed the sociology-anthropology department, and Joseph D. Smith (no relation), an associate professor of religious studies — to

interim administrative positions left open when dean of admissions James Keating and Haaland resigned. Joseph D. Smith and Ms. Rogg will serve until permanent replacements are found by search committees.

When Norman Smith announced Ms. Rogg's appointment to the administrative post, he noted that one of his reasons was her ability to serve as a bridge between faculty factions. "My loyalty has been to the college as an institution," she said.

Both Joseph Smith and Ms. Rogg say they are not interested in holding administrative offices permanently. Yet both also see their new duties as a challenge.

Ms. Rogg said she hopes to institute several new academic programs that will help re-establish the school's academic reputation.

Joseph Smith, in the meantime, has hired an entirely new admissions staff that is actively going out to high schools recruiting prospective students.

But even those professors not playing an active role in the college's renewal say the mood has improved.

Artist Athos Zacharias said his contact with the new president has been infrequent, but meaningful.

"I believe he's going to be very good for the college," he said.

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