



Wofford mourns loss of Wofford Theatre founder



Professor Emeritus James R. Gross, left, with Dr. Mark Byrnes, now professor and chair of the Department of History, in the 2008 production of "Much Ado About Nothing," directed by Dr. Mark Ferguson '94, professor and director of the Wofford Theatre). Gross died on Thursday, Jan. 28 at the Spartanburg Regional Hospice Home in Spartanburg. He was 86.

Gross, who held a B.B.A. from Wake Forest College, an M.A. from the University of North Carolina and a Ph.D. from Duke University, joined the Wofford College English faculty in 1966 and retired in 2003. He worked with students to found the Wofford Theatre Workshop during Interim 1970, directing a production of Harold Pinter's "The Birthday Party." Originally staged on a shoestring budget in the Montgomery Room of the Burwell Building, Wofford Theatre productions found a new home in 1981 as Gross inaugurated the Tony White Theater in the Campus Life Building with a production of "Twelfth Night." He also chaired the Wofford Fine Arts Department.

Dr. Mark Ferguson '94, professor of theatre at Wofford, shared the following message through the theatre department's Facebook page: "To many, including me, the example of his life as an artist, a teacher, and a mentor were an inspiration — a goad to make the most of every moment we have with each other, and an exhortation to work hard in the service of ideals you believe in. Among his other accomplishments, the remarkable growth of all the arts at Wofford over the past 50 years owes a huge debt to his vision,

passion and dedication. He was a complicated, interesting, very fun and much beloved man. He lived a full and memorable life and will be greatly missed. Sending prayers and thoughts to his daughter, Austin. Farewell, Jim."

Many people in the Wofford community have fond memories of Gross.

"His great creativity and the courage to press the envelope of the conventional kept the pot stirred at a party, a committee meeting, the theatre program he birthed or in a friendly conversation. ...a true Wofford icon," says President Emeritus Joe Lesesne, who was friends with Gross for nearly 60 years. President Emeritus Bernie Dunlap adds, "It's hard to imagine the world — and most certainly the world of Wofford — without him."

Upon his retirement as Garrison Professor of English and Theatre, 37 cascading steps along the Liberty Trail were named in his honor to mark his years of service to the college. Graduates from those years have shared their memories on social media — stories of his laugh, friendship, demand for excellence, passion for life and commitment to his craft, whether that be as a teacher, actor, director or mentor.

"J.R. Gross touched the lives of generations of students, faculty, staff and alumni, they are his legacy, along with a thriving theatre program in the Rosalind Sallenger Richardson Center for the Arts," says President Nayef Samhat. "We can never thank him enough."

Wellness Days



Emma Sutton put herself through a grueling 30-minute abdominal workout on the floor of the Benjamin Johnson Arena on Tuesday, Wofford College's first Wellness Day. And she enjoyed every second of it.

"This is something I used to do every Monday, Wednesday and Friday, and I missed it," says Sutton '23, an environmental studies and government major from Fort Mill, South Carolina. "It was good to do something normal."

Giving students a taste of normal was the goal of the day. The isolation and uncertainty brought on by COVID-19 has taken a toll, and the college wanted to give students a needed break. In addition to the ab workout, the day included meditation sessions, yoga, free smoothies and juices, s'mores and grab-and-go snacks and coloring books.

"We are all experiencing a level of anxiety about the unknowns and dealing with COVID fatigue," says Perry Henson, director of counseling and accessibility services. "These are big factors in feelings of burnout, or lack of motivation and energy. We need designated times of rest for our bodies and minds to recover and recharge in order to regain energy to move forward. We also need things to look forward to in the short term so that we can pace ourselves and make it to the next period of relief. These days can provide those times in the midst of a long semester if we all work together to honor them."

[Read more.](#)

Coronavirus Life



Last spring, Martin Aigner, instructional technologist in Information Technology Services, recorded a light-hearted song with his daughter about living in quarantine. Many of those challenges are still present seven months later.

West among inaugural honorees by Explorers Club

Dr. Paige West '91 is among the honorees in the Explorers Club's inaugural EC 50 program, which recognizes 50 explorers who are changing the world. She's one of the 21 women named to the list. More than 400 explorers were nominated from more than 50 countries.

West holds the Claire Tow Professorship in Anthropology at Barnard College and Columbia University, where she serves as the director of Columbia's Center for the Study of Social Difference. She has worked in Papua New Guinea since 1996 and studies the biodiversity and traditions of indigenous peoples while helping them conserve their cultures, languages and environments. She's the author and editor of several books and the co-founder of two nonprofits that are conservation focused. [See the complete list of honorees.](#)

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