



Former Assistant Director of Admissions and longtime voice of the Falcons George Hansen (left) stands with Dan McGinty in front of Karges Center during deconstruction earlier this month. Both men spent many, many hours in Karges gym over the past four decades.

Season of change brings McGinty, Karges eras to a close

By Kelsea Wissing

June 22, 2018-- When Dan McGinty arrived at the University of Wisconsin-River Falls in the fall of 1975, the R.A. Karges Center was just 15 years old. Over the last four decades, both McGinty and Karges Center have left a pair of indelible – albeit unique – impressions on UW-River Falls. Now, after a pair of long stints, the final chapters of the two Falcon staples on campus are coming to a close – Karges deconstruction is well underway this summer while McGinty is set to retire July 6.

McGinty's entwinement with Karges Center began when he arrived on campus in the mid-70s. He selected UW-River Falls after narrowing his top college choices to the Falcons, UW-Green Bay and UW-Eau Claire.

"UW-River Falls was the best fit for me. I was really impressed with my school visit and the people I met throughout the day," he recalled. "UWRF felt like home."

After arriving on campus, McGinty suited up for the UWRF basketball team and began a storied career. The team, of course, played and practiced in Karges Center, so he quickly found himself spending many hours in the "cracker box" gym.

“Many hours were spent in that gymnasium. As an athlete, I recall the great crowds and big victories against our rival, UW-Eau Claire. UW-Eau Claire was the best program in the conference and was every team’s target,” he explained.

McGinty spent four years playing for the Falcons and etching his name in the record books. He earned four letters in the sport and was twice the team’s Most Valuable Player. He was a three-time All-WSUC selection and was named to the NAIA All-District 14 team in both ’78 and ’79.

He led the conference and district in rebounding his junior and senior seasons and to this day, still holds the school record for game (31), season (309) and career (1,097) rebounds. He was inducted into UWRF’s Athletic Hall of Fame in 1991.

McGinty’s list of athletic accomplishments is lengthy, much like his service to the university. After graduation, he spent one season playing professional basketball in Uruguay and did a six-month stint as a substitute teacher before enrolling in UWRF’s school guidance counseling program and receiving his master of science degree in education. It was then that he embarked on the second phase of his UWRF experience – employment.

“I began my professional career in 1984 as an admissions counselor and assistant men’s basketball coach. In 1986, I accepted a position in the Office of Financial Assistance as a counselor and served as coordinator of scholarships,” explained McGinty.

After working in financial aid for two years, McGinty switched gears and accepted a position in University Advancement in 1988, an office he’ll soon be retiring from as director of Alumni Relations. His career has been distinguished and included a stint as the interim executive director of the University Advancement office and president of the UW-River Falls Foundation. In 2011, he was honored with the Chancellor’s Award for Excellence for Academic Staff.

Even after transitioning to employee after graduation, McGinty managed to not stray far from the Karges Center hardwood. During his first eight years as a UWRF employee, part of his duties included serving as an assistant coach for the men’s basketball team. He left his coaching role in 1992 to work full-time in the Advancement Office, but not before racking up many more unforgettable moments in Karges.

“The biggest win when I was coaching was the victory against UW-Eau Claire. They were ranked number one in NAIA Division I,” he reminisced. “I still can envision Rick Montreal hitting a deep shot in the corner at the end of the game to pull off that upset win.”

Inevitably, plenty of change has happened in McGinty’s four decades on campus. While he’s been busy changing roles and growing professionally, the university has been changing and growing as well. As the student body has expanded, a collection of new buildings has popped up on campus, including the most recent addition – the Falcon Center for Health, Education and Wellness.

Conceived and built as a home for the university's health and human performance and athletics departments, the new Falcon Center rendered the long-standing Karges Center obsolete and Karges was slated for deconstruction as the final phase of the Falcon Center building project. Deconstruction began in late May and the final above-ground wall of Karges gymnasium fell to the ground June 13 – but not before McGinty got a final look at it.

“It's been bittersweet to see the demolition of Karges. I have so many fond memories of that facility, but it's seen its time,” he said.

The space where Karges has stood for the past 58 years will become a green space to be utilized by the campus community. In addition to enhancing the already-picturesque campus, McGinty thinks the changing landscape of UWRF is part of why campus is thriving.

“A university should constantly be changing and improving its programs to meet the demands of society,” said McGinty. “I love our green space on campus. We have been proactive in our building initiatives and continue to have faculty and staff that are committed to teaching excellence and genuinely care about the student experience.”

“The Falcon Center provides such a unique experience, not only for athletics, but also for the use of our students and the public. Our opportunities were very limited in the past,” he continued. “This facility [the Falcon Center] will provide a unique advantage as we recruit potential students and athletes.”

Thirty-four years of employment later, McGinty's time at UW-River Falls is winding down. He's been the Director of Alumni Relations since 2001 and much like Karges Center, is a bit of a fixture on campus.

During a recent retirement reception thrown in McGinty's honor, UWRF Chancellor Dean Van Galen spoke to a packed house about McGinty's service.

“He [McGinty] is a wonderful person and has an uncommon ability to connect with people of different eras, dispositions and walks of life,” said Van Galen. “He has a deep and sincere appreciation of the University of Wisconsin-River Falls, including its wonderful history and the ways our 47,000 alumni have impacted the world.”

When asked about the most important aspect of his job as director of Alumni Relations, McGinty was quick to point out that the essence of his role – and the key to its success – are the other people in the room.

“The most important aspect of my job are my colleagues, the students, and the relationships built with our alumni and friends of UWRF,” he said.

As Van Galen pointed out, that humble approach is a large part of why McGinty's presence on campus has been so important.

“I know I speak for many when I say that my respect for Dan goes beyond ‘what’ he has done for UWRF - it’s also based on the ‘why.’ With Dan, it is not about what is best for him, rather it is *always* about what is best for the university,” Van Galen remarked. “Dan has always demonstrated integrity, sincerity and a spirit of servant leadership. Few people have impacted the success of our university as much as Dan McGinty.”

Van Galen wrapped up his remarks about McGinty with a comparison of McGinty to some of the most notable figures in UWRF history.

“In a blog I wrote last year, I referred to Dan as ‘Mr. UWRF,’” said Van Galen. “Dan embodies what is best – and what is special about UW-River Falls – and joins individuals like Don Page and Emogene Nelson as one of our university’s greatest difference makers and ambassadors. “

Like Page, Nelson and Karges before him, McGinty’s legacy at UWRF will endure long after his career ends. When planning for the Falcon Center, the university took care to ensure that R.A. Karges’ memory continued to be honored, despite his namesake building’s demolition.

The new auxiliary gym at the Falcon Center carries the Karges name and while it’s not the same gym that McGinty once played and coached in, in a way the Karges-McGinty connection will still have a common thread. At his retirement reception, McGinty was surprised with an honor similar to Karges. The north entrance to Page Arena – home of the Falcon basketball team – will bear McGinty’s name, a tribute befitting both his athletic accomplishments and his dedicated service to the university.

As his career at UW-River Falls nears its end, McGinty can’t help but reflect on the place that has helped shape his life.

“I never dreamt that I would start and finish my professional career at one place,” he said, “UWRF is a special place where faculty and staff really care about the students and each other.”

“It was the right fit for me 43 years ago and still is today,” he concluded.