

Remembering Phil Creighton

By
Blake Timm '98



It was hard to spend time around Phil Creighton and not feel special.

My first interactions with Pacific's 16th president came not in Forest Grove, but in La Grande, Oregon, where I landed my first job after graduation as news and sports director for a radio station. Phil had just arrived in town to become president of

Eastern Oregon University. I had the pleasure of interviewing him a couple of times, discussing his vision of growth for the institution.

Fast-forward five years. I had gone on to become Pacific's sports information director. Phil felt that five years was long enough to be president in one place and, in 2003, he also came to Forest Grove to become president at Pacific University.

I remember being at a meet-and-greet event for faculty and staff event, talking with Professor Mike Steele. Phil walked up and said hello to Mike. Mike started to introduce me, only to have Phil cut him off. "Blake and I go back a ways," he replied.

How he remembered a cub radio reporter after five years I will never know, but it was that ability to remember names and faces, among other things, that endeared Phil Creighton to the Pacific family. Few leaders can be visionary, dynamic and approachable all at the same. But that was Phil Creighton.

Creighton died on Sept. 16, 2024. Upon his death, many members shared their memories about a president who not only changed the face of the university, but convinced others to come along for the ride.

Pacific University President Jenny Coyle '90, OD '93, MS '00

Coyle Served As Dean Of The College of Optometry Under Phil Creighton

"Phil Creighton was a transformational leader for Pacific University. His vision was the catalyst for the diverse institution we are today. He played such a special role in my story. He was that mentor who saw things in me that I had not yet seen in myself. It transformed my journey. Phil had a special gift of remembering everyone's name, a personal touch that created a sense of understanding and belonging. I am a better person, and Pacific is a better place, for having Phil Creighton in our lives."

William Berk '09 (via Facebook)

"Pacific is not a large campus. It's more like a tight-knit community where the students and faculty all know each other, and Dr. Phil set that tone from the top down. He always made a clear point of sitting down to eat with the students. He frequently held in-depth town hall meetings to address the issues of the university. I myself interviewed him a couple of times one-on-one for the school paper.

"He was so approachable and so friendly to everyone on campus. In turn, this made every last student — down to the lowliest freshman — feel like a vital part of the community. If the president of the university could take the time to know us all on a first name basis and address us as worthy scholars, that's all the more motivation

to step up to his level. We all felt compelled to emotionally invest in the university like he invested in all of us.

“Dr. Phil was a scholar and a gentleman. A leader and a role model for students and faculty alike. Pacific was a more welcoming, more unified, more open and rewarding place because he was a part of it.”

Ryan Aiello '06, PhDEL '21 (via Facebook)

“I’m truly saddened to hear of the passing of Phil Creighton. He was such a transformational president at Pacific University and I learned so much from him. It was an honor to be serving at Pacific during those years and I’m confident Pacific University is a better place because of him.”

Tim Schauermann '66

Trustee Emeritus

“I had the great good fortune to be chair of the Pacific Board of Trustees during Phil’s tenure. I guess I can take credit for chairing the search committee that hired him. It was one of the best decisions Pacific ever made.

“He was a whirlwind of great ideas, but he also had a unique ability to execute those ideas and turn them into reality. We used to meet each Thursday for breakfast and he would come each time with a new idea. We would discuss and both offer pros and cons with ideas of what it would take in terms of money, planning, Pacific resources and people to make it happen. Some of those ideas died at our breakfast, but many went back with Phil to his team to write a business plan and execute it.

“He was also just plain a nice person. His warmth extended to everyone. If you walked across campus with him you best be prepared to stop multiple times and converse with anyone walking by. A wonderful man and a great president.”



Pete Truax '68,

MAT '83

Truax Served As A Forest Grove City Councilor & Mayor During Creighton's Tenure

"Dr. Creighton served as president of the university at a time of unique change and growth. He developed the Health Professions Campus in Hillsboro (now called the Hillsboro Campus), which was indicative of the growth of Pacific and the impact of its educational footprint and influence in Oregon.

"Closer to home, Phil Creighton was instrumental in the remodeling and enhancement of Lincoln Park, partnering with the City of Forest Grove, and sharing his vision. In addition, Pacific added Thatcher Park in northwest Forest Grove to the itinerary of public parks in this city.

"Phil's smile and his constant twinkle in his eye will be missed by all who knew him. As British poet Stephen Spender concluded in his poem, *I Think Continually of Those Who Were Truly Great* "... Born of the sun, they traveled a short while toward the Sun...And left the vivid air signed with their honor."

Rob DeCou '05

"In 2003, I had the privilege of meeting Phil Creighton, the then-incoming president at Pacific University. I remember sitting through the interviews of different candidates and being struck by his kindness, focus on people, and a vision for steady consistent improvement of the campus if he was selected as the president.

"After he took on the position, his actions more than lived up to his pledge to our campus. One aspect of his presidency that sticks out to me was his inauguration, where I had the privilege of speaking and introducing him to the campus. We were honored by a 'Boxer Flash' when the wrestlers drove by with Boxer II in tow. A few other highlights include the monthly dinner nights he and his wife, Leigh, would host with different groups of students at his house. Phil was known for his commitment to knowing students, faculty and staff. He was often seen eating lunch in the cafeteria and at student events.

"Phil Creighton was one of the most influential mentors in my college years and beyond. He empowered everyone around him and created lasting change at Pacific University. He was an outstanding leader who embodied compassion, while encouraging personal and professional growth. The life lessons and practices he lived will continue on in his legacy. I am grateful to have known him and called him a friend, and the world is a little more dim without his presence. Godspeed and well done on a life well lived!"

Tuesday, Jan. 7, 2025