

WEN CHAO CHEN

Born in 1915 in Shanxi Province, China, arriving in the United States in 1945 to study at Grinnell College, Wen Chao Chen came to Kalamazoo College in 1950 as a protege and temporary boarder of then President John Everton, launching an unparalleled career that took him to the very heart of the College and its several communities. Beginning as an instructor in Political Science, Chen was quickly advanced to full professor. Dissatisfied with doing only one job at a time, and confirmed in a radical disbelief in the forty-hour work week, Chen quickly began to combine teaching with at least one other full-time service to the College which became his real American home. In their early years, Chen and Lillia lived in Harmon Hall serving as dorm parents, and initiated a custom of quietly looking after generations of K students who, for the moment, had no one else to be there for them. Chen soon joined Elton Ham in serving the wider College community through the Municipal Research Bureau and other city activities. When the College needed to modernize its library, Chen spent his summers at the University of Chicago, obtaining a Master's degree in library science to add to his Political Science PhD. from St. Louis University and became the College librarian who designed the Upjohn Library, a facility of which the College remains very proud a quarter-century later. Because a completed and smoothly running library gave him little to do, Chen moved to the Vice-Presidency of the College, a step which confirmed that he already had become the College's Everything Man, serving at various times in almost all senior administrative roles in the institution, including acting as President and Executive Vice-President. At the same time as taking responsibility for major areas of the College, Chen developed the Stryker Center to its current eminence and effectiveness and established its and his College home in the old president's house where he had first boarded with the Evertons.

Despite his heavy commitments to the College, Chen became concerned about the condition of his adopted city and county and devoted countless thousands of his "free" hours to bettering this place through the Business-Academia Dialogue, the core Council of Governments, the Forum for Kalamazoo County, and most recently, the Futures and Equities Commissions. With these efforts and his ever cheery good will, Chen became the person in the region with whom all sides were willing to meet in an atmosphere of trust. In the midst of all this, he was asked by the late Chief Justice G. Mennen Williams to reform the court system of Michigan.

As a young man, Chen was instructed by his mother to study and work with such diligence that as an adult he would be of sufficient eminence that the county magistrate would invite him to sit in that eminence's presence. Now in his later years, it is Chen himself who invites the magistrates and mayors and commissioners to rest their feet while they all reason together for a better Kalamazoo.

For Kalamazoo College, Chen has been as close to being indispensable as a human being can be. For the community, Chen has, with gracious modesty, held out a vision of a better place, holding tenaciously to his belief in our ability for excellence and thereby drawing from us more than we knew we had inside.

Mr. President, on behalf of his colleagues on the faculty, I am deeply proud to recommend Wen Chao Chen for the degree of Doctor of Humane Letters.