Remarkable Columbian: Roger Lehecka Retires

By Kristin Sterling

The truly great ones always go out on top and Roger Lehecka, CC’67, is no exception. After carrying his 30-plus-year career at Columbia as executive director of the hugely successful 250th anniversary celebration, Lehecka has retired from the University but will continue to be actively involved in the Columbia community.

Known by generations of Columbia students, alumni and faculty as a一股 patron of liberal arts students, Lehecka has served as a mentor to many college students over the years, even those who were not much younger than he, from his early role on the College dean’s staff through his 19 years as dean of students for the College. Lehecka spent all but one year at Columbia after entering the gates as a first-year student in 1963. His legacy is as rich as his length of service. He was one of the founders of the Double Discovery Center, a program that offers college preparation and advice to under-resourced high school students. As dean of students in the 1980s, he worked to improve graduation rates from 75 percent to 90 percent over a period of six years. He was instrumental in the College’s smooth transition to a fully residential facility in the 1990s, and he created Columbia’s National Opportunity Program. In 1998, he became director of admissions, a position he would carry on for 14 years. As director of admissions, Lehecka oversaw the large jump in the number of applications and a rising number of students from diverse backgrounds. In 2001, he was part of the presidential search commission that brought Lee C. Bollinger to Columbia.

Roger served Columbia College and its students selflessly, tirelessly and ideallyistically for two decades,” said Austin E. Quigley, dean of Columbia College. “His responsibilities as dean of students were enormous, the challenges considerable and the achievements immense. His efforts to strengthen our Opportunity Programs and to improve the coeducational transition and to promote a fully residential community are among the most visible. His benevolence to the students, their academic and extracurricular development, and the quality of the education stronger, everyone at Columbia College will always be grateful.

Along with his big accomplishments, Lehecka is equally revered for personal touching the lives of hundreds of College students as a mentor. “I’ve had the satisfactions of knowing generations of bright and challenging students, of helping a few on their way to maturity, to responsible lives, to productive careers,” reflects Lehecka. “I love for Columbia and my debt to it remain enormous. In my early years working here, I thought that in some modest way I was repaying Columbia for this wonderful education that assumption was incorrect because the longer I’ve worked at Columbia the larger my debt has grown.”

If his responsibilities to Columbia College are enormous, he is equally great over the years Lehecka, along with his wife, has founded scholarship programs supported by various foundations and corporations, including The New York Times, the St. Petersburg Times and the Lenovo Foundation. Lehecka will continue his work helping to administer scholarship programs.

Lehecka’s life: Many at Columbia need not say goodbye, since he will still be connected to his alma mater through his service on the boards of the Double Discovery Center, Columbia Community Service and Columbia Club of New York. In addition, he will continue to be an ambassador for the University. He has recently returned from meeting with alumni in Detroit and plans to head to New Orleans in the coming weeks to meet with alumni there. “One thing Lehecka hopes the coming months offer is the opportunity to spend quality time with his family,” he said.

At his retirement celebration, a group of alumni announced that they had raised more than $100,000 to establish and endow the Roger Lehecka Summer Fellowship, which will offer a stipend to a College junior who would otherwise not be able to accept an unpaid internship. “Very rarely someone like Roger comes along who takes a relationship (with the alma mater) to a completely different level, virtually embodying the values of the College and University where he has served as an alumnus and as a senior administrator.” President Lee C. Bollinger said at Lehecka’s retirement party. “We can celebrate his visible achievements, but I know that his real work here is reflected in each student, each alumnus and each colleague: he has influenced, comforted, counseled and encouraged all of us who have been on the receiving end want to say thank you.”

“Roger is so beloved by so many, a selfless mentor to generations,” says Janet Frankston, CC ’95, one of the organizers of the fundraising effort. “It is a pleasure for me and so many others to give back to him.”

Perhaps Elaine Suman, chair of the Department of Drama, sums it up best: “As Roger continues his work outside Columbia, he is taking the best of the Columbia he has learned as a student, alumnus, dean and brilliant programmatic innovator and sharing it outside the gates.”

Global University

Prague Quadrennial Appoints Aronson

By Madeleine Perez

It’s a major honor to be selected commissioner of a world-renowned international theatre conference, but when the appointee is the first to be born outside the host country, it’s a breakthrough performance.

Arnold Aronson, professor of theatre arts at the Graduate School of the Arts, will serve as the commissioner of the Prague Quadrennial (PQ), an international exhibit of stage design and theatre architecture held in the Czech Republic. As commissioner, Aronson will be an ambassador for the University’s history and its contributions to the world community. “It is a pleasure for me and so many others to give back to him.”

The PQ, which hosts approximately 50 participating countries, was founded by the Ministry of Culture of the Czech Republic and the Theatre Institute in Prague. The goal of the exhibition, along with its accompanying seminars and workshops, is to provide an opportunity to compare and study recent trends in world theatre and to promote a fully residential community. “We want to personalize our visitors’ experience of the University,” Aronson said. “We want to personalize our visitors’ experience of the University.”

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Aronson served as chair of the Theatre Division at Columbia from 1991 through 1998 and has chaired theatre departments at the University of Michigan and Hunter College. In 1995, Aronson was a curator of the American National Exhibit during the PQ and served as president of the PQ International Jury in 1991 and 1999. He is the author of History and Theory of Environmental Scenography, American Set Design, Architectural Dreams: The Theatrical Vision of Joseph Urban, and American Avant-Garde Theatre: A History. He is currently working on looking into the Abyss: Essays on Scenography, which will be published later this year.


For more information about the PQ, visit www.pq.cz/04/index.html.

Several More Inches, No Less Interest

The Visitors’ Center, located in 213 Low Library, plays a major role in welcoming thousands of people to the Morningside campus who want to learn more about the University’s history and its contributions to the world beyond.

There are two types of tours: one for prospective undergraduate students and their parents, and another for prospective graduate students and anyone else who is interested in learning more about the campus.

“We want to personalize our visitors’ experience of Columbia as much as possible,” Angela Hoyte, assistant director of the Visitors’ Center, says. “Because we get more and more people coming in who want something other than a general tour of the campus, it’s really one no matter what is needed, and with a little notice we can do it in just about any language—from Armenian to Urdu.”

For more information, call the Visitors’ Center at (212) 854-4900 or go to www.studentaffairs.columbia.edu/admissions/visit.