

# UW-Stevens Point: March 22 event at UW-Stevens Point honors Albertson legacy

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An event Wednesday, March 22, marks the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of a tragic loss. It will also be the first time many of the survivors meet.

In March 1967, James H. Albertson, president of the Wisconsin State University-Stevens Point, and seven other higher education leaders were conducting a study of Vietnamese public higher education. While traveling between universities in the southeast Asia country, bad weather forced the team's plane to crash near Da Nang. Everyone was killed.

Their legacy will be honored during a presentation March 22 in Albertson Hall, the learning resources center built in 1970 and named in Dr. Albertson's honor.

A year ago, when one of Albertson's children posted a Facebook memory of their father, daughter C.L. Fornari heard from a friend: "My father was on that same flight." She and Lynne Conroy, both live on Cape Cod, are volunteer master gardeners and have known each other more than 20 years. But they never knew they had this loss in common, Fornari said.

"Our connection through Facebook led us to search out and contact other children of the men who were on this team. And this ultimately brought us to the marking of this anniversary in Stevens Point," she said. Twelve of the surviving children will gather March 22 on campus. "We all share similar histories but it will be the first

time that most of us have met," Fornari said.

Conroy's father was Vincent Conroy, Center for Field Studies director, Graduate School of Education, Harvard University. Others on the team were: Harry Bangsberg, president of Bemidji State University; A. Donald Beattie, School of Business and Economics dean, University of Wisconsin-Whitewater; Howard Johnshoy, dean, Academic Affairs, Gustavus Adolphus College; Arthur Pickett, Honors Programs director, University of Illinois at Chicago; Melvin Wall, Plant and Earth Sciences head, University of Wisconsin-River Falls; and Robert LaFollette, Higher Education Adviser, U.S. Agency for International Development, U.S. Operations Mission to Vietnam.

Fornari, one of three Albertson children to attend March 22, will present materials, including her father's diary and letters between her parents.

"President Albertson was a rare, visionary leader who did much to lay the foundation upon which our university stands today," Chancellor Bernie Patterson said. "He was so dedicated to his vision of lifting up everyone through the power of knowledge and education that he traveled to war-torn southeast Asia in 1967, to offer hope to the people of Vietnam."

At age 36, Albertson became the eighth president of Wisconsin State College-Stevens Point in 1962. American higher education was experiencing unprecedented growth, both in enrollment and curriculum, as the baby boom generation began entering American colleges, Reich wrote in his thesis. Albertson set the college on a course of steady growth and change, bringing new ideas to the campus and the community. Enrollment grew from 2,500 students in 1962 to more than 5,900 in 1967, and the first graduate degree programs were offer. He focused on making students better prepared to succeed by becoming global citizens.

Albertson led the team of educators to Vietnam, working with LaFollette, a former colleague at Ball State who then was at the U.S. Agency for International Development. The team was engaged in a "quiet war" in Vietnam, Tom Reich wrote in his thesis on this project. He is acquisitions and collection development librarian and associate professor of library science at UW-Stevens Point.

"The years of 1966 and 1967 marked significant turning points in American educational assistance. The U.S. was now fully engaged in two wars in the Republic of Vietnam: 'the fighting war—the familiar war—[where] men kill and are killed.

[And] the 'other war...the quiet war,' the men who battle on our side do not kill, but they may be killed.' Americans went to South Vietnam to wage war in differing ways, as they fought 'to save a country and build a nation...'" Reich wrote. WSU-Stevens Point committed to join 'other war.'

Albertson's legacy continues at UW-Stevens Point. In addition to Albertson Hall, the Albertson Medallion Award is given to less than 1 percent of those graduating each year. It is the highest award UW-Stevens Point gives to students.