



Omaha, Nebraska's
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Home for the Holidays

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Musical Marriage

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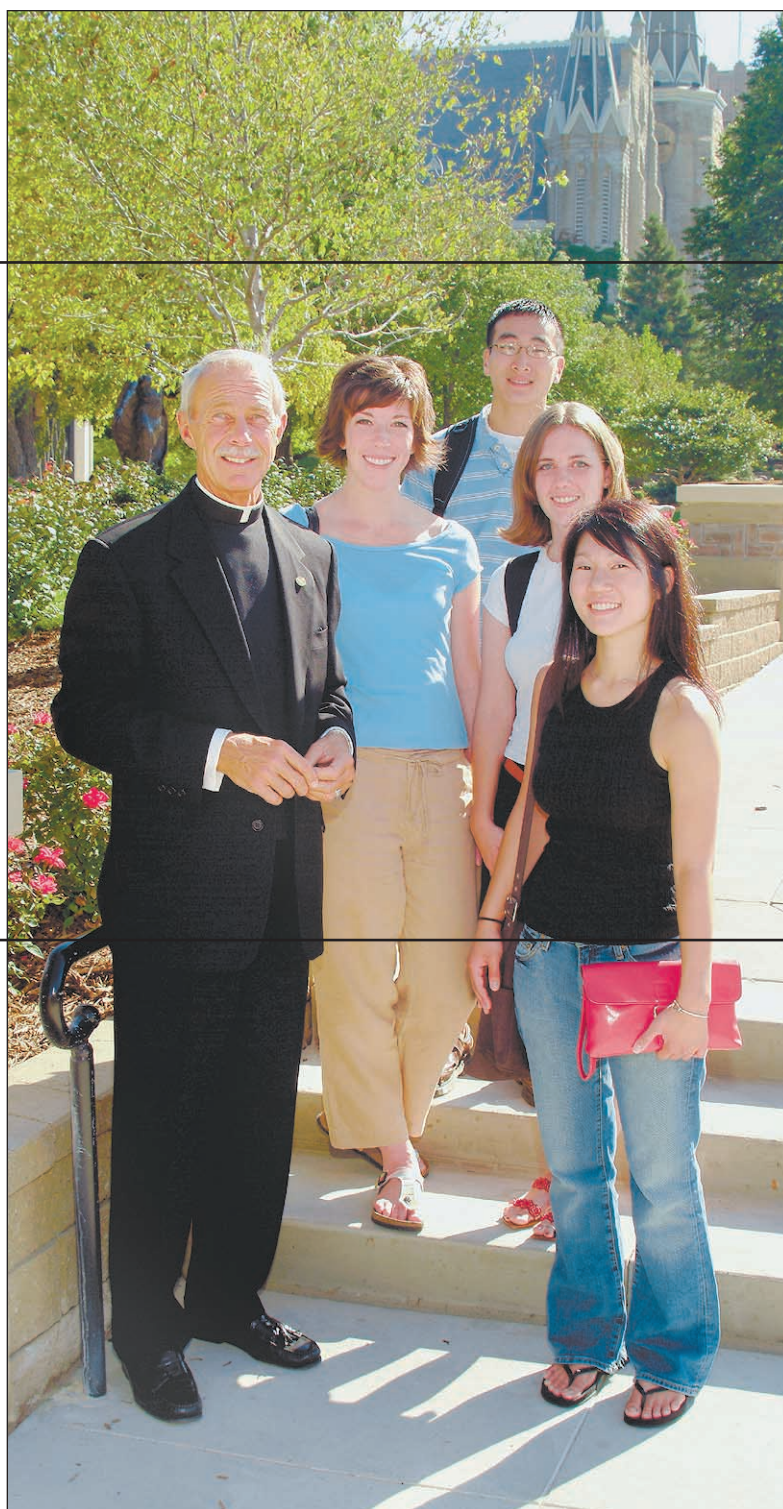
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Creighton's CATALYST

Story by
JUDY HORAN
Photos by
JACQUELINE LORINCE



Creighton's president, the Rev. John P. Schlegel, S.J., is the man behind the school's ambitious expansion program and record enrollment. And he makes a mean plate of risotto.

Creighton University President John P. Schlegel's residence is a spacious apartment atop Heider Hall on the Creighton campus. Schlegel entertains around 1,000 guests a year there.

Visitors to Schlegel's residence can expect two things: a spectacular bird's-eye view of Creighton's ambitious campus expansion, and a hot plate of risotto, a rice dish Schlegel learned to cook in Tuscany, Italy.

"He is the risotto king of Omaha," says Schlegel's friend, attorney Steve Bruckner.

Cooking is how Schlegel relaxes and how he forms relationships for the university.

"It's a way to show people they mean something to you," he says.

Those relationships have resulted in a period of unprecedented growth in Creighton's 126-year history. Some \$83 million worth of construction projects are either completed or in progress. Projects under his watch include:

An ultra-modern soccer stadium, the finishing touches of which will be completed this fall.

"Davis Square," red-brick town homes for juniors and seniors, which now anchor the university's eastward expansion. The town homes are the first of three planned.

A new student mall, which was renovated for beauty and more green space and to encourage interaction and socialization among students.

The purchase of property between Webster and California

Streets and 30th and 32nd streets. Now used for parking, the land will eventually be used for buildings.

An extension of the central mall, which will stretch from 27th St. to 17th St. It's now up to 21st street.

Seventeen new bronze statues on campus, including a statue of St. Ignatius of Loyola, the Jesuit Order founder.

Establishment of the Creighton University Medical Center.

Expansion of the Integrated Science Center, which includes the new Hixson-Lied Science Building and renovated Rigge Science and Criss Health Sciences buildings.

An aggressive biomedical research program.

Bruce Rohde, chairman of ConAgra Foods Inc. and vice chairman of the Creighton board, says he's been impressed with Schlegel's ability to inspire teamwork.

"He rallies people and unites them," Rohde says. "He's a good communicator, fair, flexible, adaptable and versatile."

Rohde has been a dinner guest of Schlegel's on many occasions. In fact, he presented Schlegel with a set of several place settings of ConAgra china on which to serve his meals.

One of Schlegel's favorite dinner games, his guests say, is to have his visitors guess the secret ingredient in whatever he's prepared. Bruckner has never heard anyone name the secret ingredient.

"Sometimes I wonder if there is one," he jokes.

Schlegel was recruited to the Creighton presidency in 2000. At

the time, he had been the president of the University of San Francisco for nine years. Prior to that, he'd served as the executive and academic vice president at John Carroll University (1988-1991), the dean of arts and sciences at Marquette University (1984-1988) and academic dean of Rockhurst College (1982-1984).

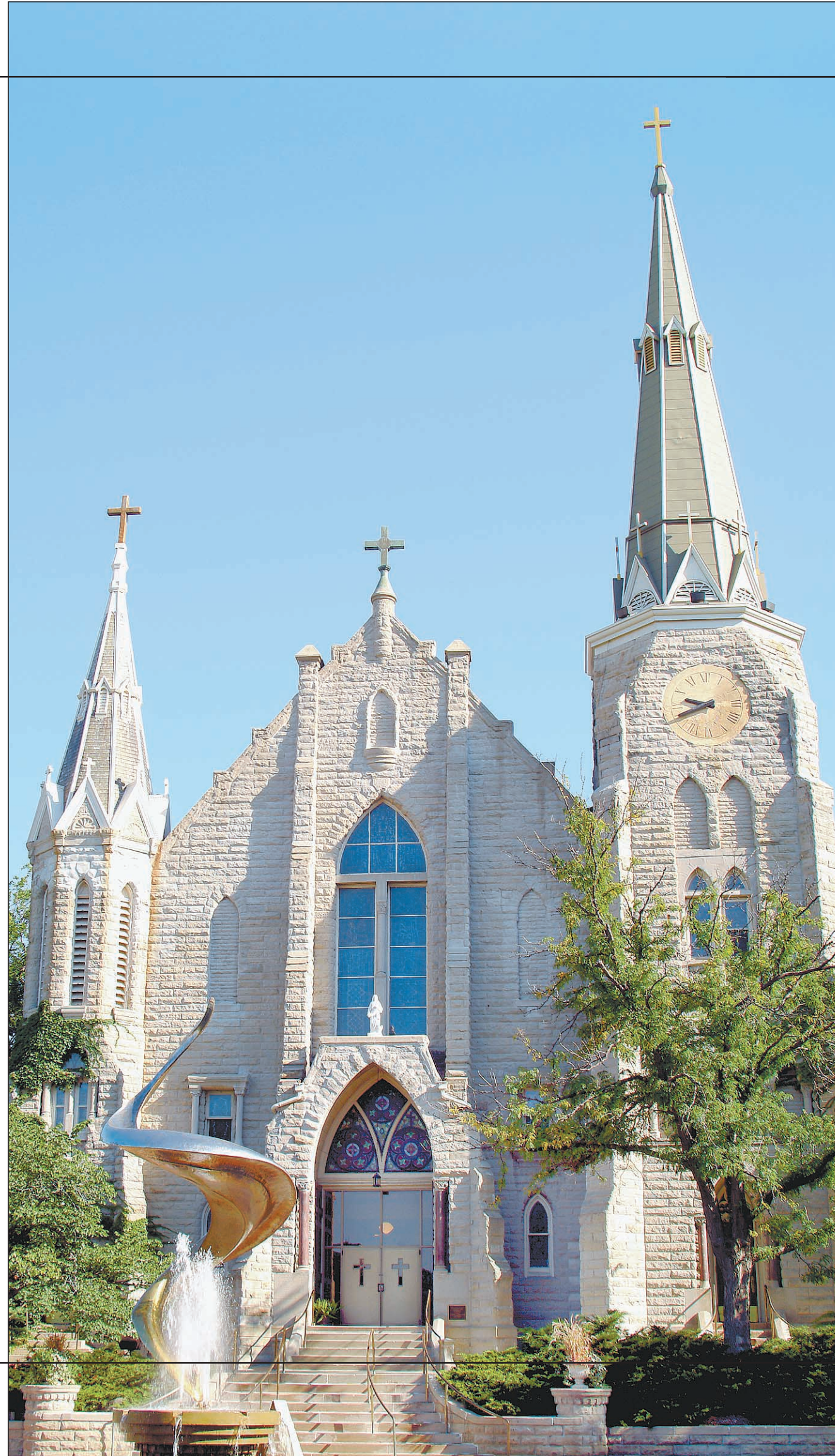
Before embarking on his professional career, Schlegel studied at the University of London and earned an honors degree in theology in 1973. He then remained in England for a doctorate in international relations at Oxford University, 60 miles from London, in 1977.

"I loved living in England," Schlegel says. "I took away from that six years the realization that the world is incredibly diverse and my destiny, whatever I did in the university world, had an aspect of diversity to it."

He brought his passion for diversity to Creighton. He immediately initiated an Office of Multicultural and Community Affairs for Health Sciences, an annual city-wide Diversity Summit and an annual CEO Breakfast for corporate Omaha. He began a Women's Resource Center.

"We're the only Catholic University and one of only two private schools in the country to have a Native-American studies program," says Schlegel, pointing out that one in four persons in the country is African American, Latino, Asian or Native American. All are groups Creighton is aggressively recruiting.

Left: Schlegel with members of Creighton's student body (clockwise from top): Jaime Wewel, Chad Wilson, Lindsey Koester, Sara Wellman. Right: St. John's Church on Creighton's campus.



He has an interest in the economic development of third-world countries and serves on the Paris-based Organization for Economic Development and Cooperation.

On his university team, there are now three female vice presidents - there were none when he arrived - and two female deans. There are now six females on the board of directors; when he arrived at Creighton, there were two.

Last year, Schlegel received the Otto Swanson Spirit of Service Award from the National Conference for Community and Justice for promoting understanding and respect among all

races, religions and cultures.

Besides diversity, another thing living in London gave Schlegel an appreciation for was opera. He is now on the board of directors of Opera Omaha and, in fact, combined his love for music with his love for cooking by volunteering as a celebrity chef at an Opera Omaha event.

Besides cooking and the opera, Schlegel also has a keen interest in athletics.

Schlegel attends every Creighton home basketball game for men and makes regular appearances at the women's games. He also attends most Bluejay soccer games. He'll step onto the field of Creighton's new soccer stadium on Oct. 15th to dedicate it.

"It's rapidly becoming one of the best fields in the country because of the quality of its turf and the fact it's in a bowl," he says, "and that it's built exclusively for soccer."

He's committed to making the new soccer stadium a community-wide resource. The Omaha Symphony played there on Sept. 11.

Creighton's tall, lean president is an athlete himself. He exercises 45 minutes, five days a week and plays racquetball, squash and tennis with friends, faculty and students. He was on the crew team and played ice hockey while in graduate school at Oxford University in England.

Over the door of his office hangs an oar used by the rowing

team that Schlegel founded and coached at Creighton when he was the university's assistant academic vice president from 1978 to 1982. The oar is inscribed, "To our founding father."

Just as Schlegel exercises his body, he does spiritual exercises through daily prayer. Creighton's Retreat Center in a rural area near Griswold, Iowa, is his "get-away" place. It's where he goes for serious reflection.

Though the church ended up being his calling, Schlegel says he never intended to be a Jesuit priest.

"I wanted to be a lawyer and go into public service," he says. "John Kennedy influenced my life and my whole approach to public service."

But he attended a retreat led by a Jesuit in 1962 while a freshman in college and decided to give it a try, putting his plans to become a lawyer on hold. He entered the Society of Jesus in 1963 and was ordained in 1973.

"It's 41 years later, and here I still am."

Though he heads up a major university, Schlegel never sees a pay check.

"My salary is contributed directly to the Jesuit community," says Schlegel, who as a Jesuit priest has taken a vow of poverty. "I own nothing."

His favorite place to shop is The Salvation Army.

"I'm not a clothes horse," says the man in the white collar, who doesn't worry about what tie to

put on in the morning.

Instead, Schlegel saves his concern for Creighton's students and the university's expansion plans.

Many of the ideas for campus expansion were being considered before Schlegel arrived. But the new president made the dreams a reality.

"With great power and confidence, he said 'That's what we're going to do' and he led the charge," Rohde says.

Under Schlegel, Creighton earned a No. 1 ranking in the U.S. News & World Report magazine rankings of Midwest comprehensive universities for the seventh

time in nine years. Creighton also was ranked for the 18th straight year at or near the top of the magazine's "America's Best Colleges" edition.

But Schlegel says his job is far from finished.

"The university's master plan is meant to be a living document," says Schlegel. "I don't believe in planning and putting it in a corner."

The planning process over three phases includes student, faculty, staff and board. Each phase lasts about four years.

Bruce Lauritzen, chairman of First National of Nebraska, says Schlegel has raised the bar to

make a good university even better. Lauritzen's family business has been closely aligned with Creighton from its start. Edward Creighton, head of the family that gave funds to start the university, was First National Bank's first president.


"Father Schlegel has done an outstanding job of raising a vision as to what he believes the university could become," Lauritzen says. "I think he has an engaging personality which allows him to work with all types of people and all ages and garner their good will and excitement toward his vision for the university."

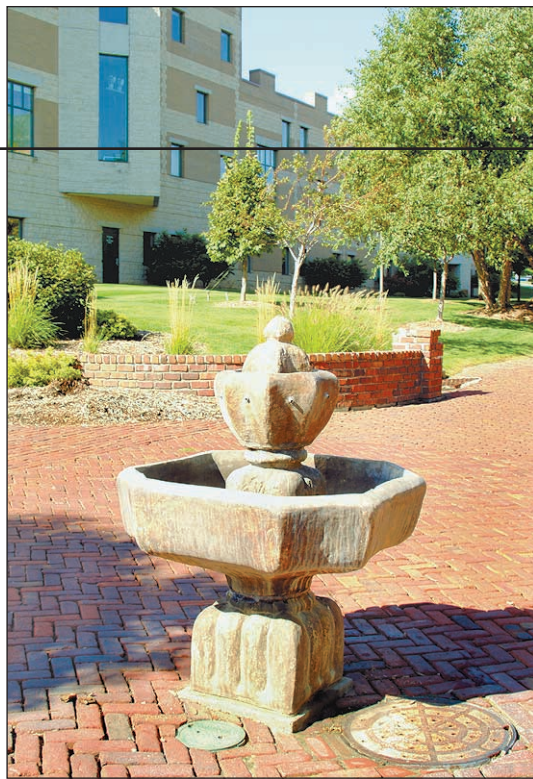
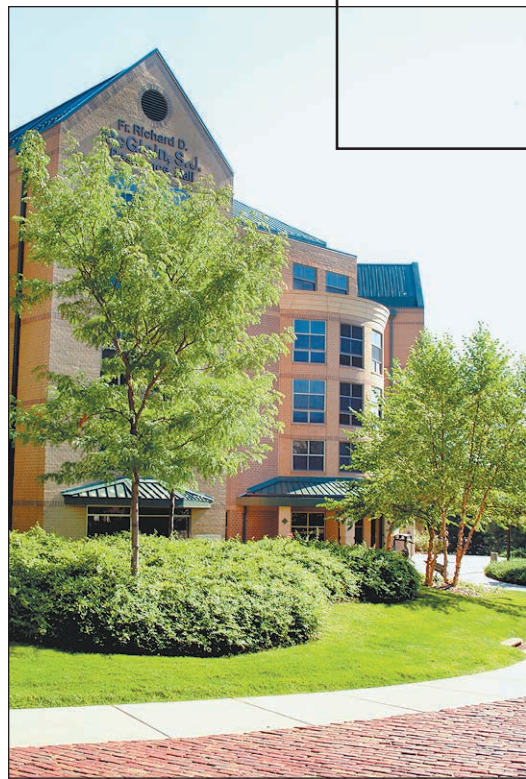
William Fitzgerald, chairman of the Creighton board of directors and chairman of Commercial Federal Bank, says Schlegel is very involved with the student body. "Father John brings

a tremendous enthusiasm and vision to the university. He's motivated to excel for the university.

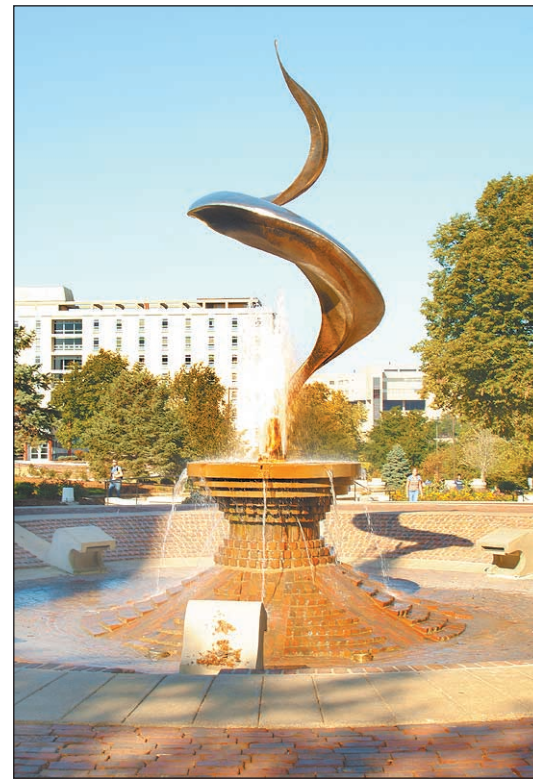
"There's an awful lot of excitement going on because of his leadership. He's dreaming bigger dreams and has more aspirations to move the university to a new level."

Schlegel's former student and friend, Joe Kavan, points to the good relationship the university president has with Kavan's children. Two are now Creighton students.

"He's the most intelligent individual that I know. Caring and compassionate," Kavan says. "At some point, he's going to feel his work at Creighton is on its way. When he moves on, he's going to leave a legacy as a compassionate visionary, a legacy that won't be forgotten for a long time." 



A tour of campus (left to right): McGloin Hall; a fountain in front of the Lied Education Center for the Arts; boy on stilts statue in front of Creighton's School of Law. Opposite page (left to right): Davis Square Residence Hall; Swanson Hall; The Eternal Flame.



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