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## Roach to retire from WestConn

By Mark Langlois  
THE NEWS-TIMES

DANBURY — When James Roach arrived at Western Connecticut State University 12 years ago, the Midtown campus looked like a collection of unrelated buildings surrounding a rundown parking lot.

Monday, the university president announced his retirement from a well-manicured downtown campus complete with matching buildings, brick walkways, and trees.

Roach, 71, will retire in July. He has been a college president for 18 years, he said, and it's time for a break.

Before taking the job at WestConn, Roach was president of the University of Maine at Presque Isle for six years. After retirement, he and his wife, Denise Hogan, who holds a doctorate in religion at Boston University, will spend winters in Florida and summers on Cape Cod.

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### Outgoing president seen as sensitive, respected

By Joe Gould  
THE NEWS-TIMES

On the night of a 20-year-old art student's suicide last March, Western Connecticut State University President James Roach visited students personally. He wept with them; he offered comforting words late into the night.

The next day, flags were flown at half-staff, and Roach sent students a letter explaining what had happened. He organized a memorial service attended by more than 400 students.

"On the night it happened, he came from home to talk to people, to get their feelings.

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The News-Times/Wendy Carlson  
Western Connecticut State University president James Roach looks over the campus Tuesday after announcing his plans to retire in July after 12 years at the university.

# ▷ Roach to retire as WestConn president

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One of Roach's goals when he arrived was to help build a sense of community within the university and to extend that sense of community to the rest of Danbury.

"I remember talking to the faculty when I arrived about Western becoming the jewel in the crown of the university system," Roach said. "That was a lot harder to say 12 years ago when we were parking in the center of the campus. It's been wonderful, and I'll miss it very much."

Today, that old parking lot is the quad with brick paths and trees. The university has a parking garage, a new student center, a new science building under construction and more improvements planned. Construction will start any day on the Westside campus on a new dormitory expected to open next September.

William Cibes Jr., chancellor of the Connecticut State University System, said Roach was a great leader and the right fit for WestConn for the last 12 years.

"He brought strong academic distinction to the university," Cibes said.

The search for Roach's replacement will start with the university board of trustees over the next several months, Cibes said. The process will take six or seven months. Roach's salary this year is about \$198,000.

The trustees hired a search firm to replace Southern Connecticut State University President Michael Adanti, who retired this year, Cibes said. He said WestConn's search would be similar. In each case the trustees and Cibes talk to the university faculty and staff about what kind of president the university needs.

"They know better than anybody else what the university needs," Cibes said, "and the president that Southern needs will be different from the president that Western needs."

History professor Herbert F. Janick said Roach helped bring unity to a university at a time when growing pains had fostered tension between the faculty and administration.

Under former president Stephen Feldman, the perception among faculty was that the administration favored the business school on the Westside campus, and ignored the arts and sciences on the Midtown campus, Janick said. "At one point the faculty contemplated a vote of no-confidence in him,"

he added.

According to Janick, Roach arrived as a conciliatory figure. He was cautious and conservative. He emphasized the ceremonial, and new buildings successfully helped inspire pride in the school.

For that reason, Janick called the last chapter in his 2002 history of the university "Healing."

"He felt he had to do something with bricks and mortar," Janick said of Roach. "He understood buildings and how people would feel about them."

Roach said the university also grew academically in the last 12 years. He said the first 25 candidates will be chosen today for the doctoral program in instructional leadership, WestConn's first doctoral program.

"The academic level of the school improved along with its physical buildings," said David Nurnberger, vice president of human resources with Boehringer Ingelheim Pharmaceuticals in Ridgefield and Danbury. Boehringer has numerous cooperative arrangements with WestConn, including a 20-week management training program. The company gave WestConn \$100,000 toward its ongoing capital fund campaign. "We employ more than 120 employees currently with WestConn degrees."

Boehringer has hired WestConn professors during the summer for lab work, which takes the teachers out of the classrooms and shows them what the most modern labs are

doing every day. That's part of what Roach was talking about when he said he wanted to build community.

"Jim provided outstanding leadership that built bridges into the community," Nurnberger said.

ATMI in Danbury is giving WestConn \$1,000 a year for the next five years to help create a technology scholarship for students taking chemistry, information technology or other similar technical programs. That is part of ATMI's Charitable Matching Program designed to support education and technical training, said Dean Hamilton, communications director with ATMI.

"WestConn's been an important resource for us for high-quality employees," Hamilton said.

Eugene Buccini, now vice president of academic affairs, was chairman of the management department when Roach arrived in 1992. Buccini still teaches leadership and negotiation and conflict resolution at the university.

"The faculty was rather looking forward to him coming. They knew he was attuned to academics," Buccini said. "It worked out great."

Buccini mentioned numerous programs that started during Roach's tenure, including the doctoral program, the Master of Fine Arts program in drawing and painting, the MFA starting next year in writing, the Jane Goodall Institute, the certificate program in direct marketing and the school's gerontology pro-

gram.

"He was the kind of administrator who would say yes to a good idea backed up with solid research and support," Buccini said.

The challenges that will face the new president are in part an outgrowth of the changes and construction at WestConn over the last decade.

Roach said the new dormitory will push the student population of residential students to nearly 50 percent.

"Once that figure is reached, the university has different needs. We need more services and activities for residential students. We need more staff," Roach said. Dealing with that change will be the new president's responsibility.

The plan is to build a new student center on the Westside campus, as well as a fine arts building there. The new science building scheduled to open in early 2005 will also have a grassy quad nearby, as will the new parking garage planned for the corner of Osborne Street and Fifth Avenue. That will be three quads at Western, giving it more of a campus feel, Roach said.

Where will the students park while the university builds a parking garage on the existing Osborne Street parking lot?

"That's up to the new president to decide," Roach said.

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# ▷ Outgoing president

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He didn't have to do that, but he did," said 22-year-old Mack Mathieu, president of the Inter-Residence Hall Association. "I have nothing bad to say about him, I respect him very much."

Roach was not the kind of president who marched through campus shaking hands and patting backs. When students were told the 71-year-old WestConn president would retire in July, several said they knew little or nothing about him.

But faculty members and other students who had encountered him described Roach as a sensitive man, someone who could strike just the right tone at public functions. And, according to associate chemistry department chairman Paul Hines, Roach is "an academic through and through."

Hines credited Roach with securing a multi-million-dollar state grant for a new science building. Behind the scenes, Roach attended faculty meetings regularly and offered support, but "he did not micro-manage."

When the basement of a science building flooded, Hines recalled, "he was there wading in the water; he wasn't just sitting in his office . . . He wanted to know how the damage would affect research, what was lost."

"There are some businessmen out there running universities like businesses, but Jim had a sense of what makes a university different," said Hines.

In the view of history professor Herbert Janick, who recently wrote a history of the university, Roach won't be remembered as a "dynamic educational leader" as much as a someone who soothed tensions.

"He's a very approachable, decent person," said Janick.

Roach, who's known for valuing the surrounding community and the university's history, started an annual dinner for

retired faculty. "He's there and he talks to everyone," Janick said.

Roach also keeps daily office hours. Though she never has, student and dormitory resident assistant Amy Bogert said she felt she could reach out to the president if need be. "I'm an R.A. and during our training they said, 'If you want to ask him anything, he'll make time for you.'"

Still, Roach is not without detractors. Students protesting budget cuts and a tuition hike under Gov. John G. Rowland's administration heckled a Rowland campus visit in 2000. Yet Rowland was invited back for a building dedication in 2002 and again to speak at the 2003 commencement.

Protesting students have been arrested on at least two occasions when the university could have chosen to promote free speech, said Genette Nowak, former editor of the campus newspaper, *The Echo*.

Nowak cast Roach as out of touch and insensitive to students' wishes. "James Roach, he's the man behind the curtain. No one sees him unless a student dies," said Nowak, adding later: "He never went out of his way to talk to me, and I was the head of the school newspaper."

Lt. Gov. M. Jodi Rell, and not Rowland, ultimately spoke at the graduation.

Thus far, freshman Ryan Lockwood said he has only seen Roach once, at orientation. He didn't remember what the president said, but Roach seemed trustworthy and approachable, "which is weird because he's in a position of power."

"He's obviously made a lot of contributions to the school. If he's going, more power to him," said Lockwood. "I'm sure everyone wishes him the best of luck."

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