The Hovde Years

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Epilog

After the retirement honors, accolades, and the well-wishing of countless friends, colleagues, students—a grateful public—the Hovdes moved from the home on Seventh Street hill where they had lived for a quarter of a century and moved into a new one built and owned by the Purdue Research Foundation at 1701 Redwood Lane in Lafayette’s Vinton Woods section.

They lived near their two daughters, and their lives were thus enriched by frequent family visits and the world of their eight grandchildren. They made Lafayette their permanent home, though they traveled as time and health permitted and wintered each year from January to April at Pauma Valley Country Club in southern California.

On March 13, 1975, the board of trustees immortalized the university’s tenth president by renaming the Executive Building the Frederick L. Hovde Hall of Administration, thus honoring the man who served longer as president than any other and whose wise guidance steered Purdue through its greatest period of growth between 1946 and 1971. Later, he was invited to take the honorary Doctor of Laws degree, conferred at a Founders’ Day dinner on April 26, 1975, during gala weekend. The honorary doctorate was his twenty-first.

In retirement, the Hovdes enjoyed quiet, relaxed lives with their close friends and family but also engaged in some local civic and social activities. He has served as a special consultant on industrial relations for the Purdue Research Foundation and continued his work as a member of the boards of directors of General Electric Company and Inland Steel Company, and the boards of several Minneapolis-based affiliated mutual funds—Investors Mutual, Investors Selective Fund, Investors Stock Fund, Investors Variable Payment Fund, and IDS Bond Fund.

Until he suffered a stroke in 1978, Hovde maintained regular but abbreviated office hours in his third-floor quar-
ters in the building that bears his name. He retired from Inland Steel’s board in April, 1978, and was honored at a banquet March 29, 1979, in New York City at his impending retirement from the General Electric board on which he had served twenty-three years. He also resigned from a three-year term on the board of directors of the Sears-Roebuck Foundation in January, 1979.

On May 16, 1978, Hovde was watching television alone in his room at New York’s Drake Hotel on the eve of a GE board of directors meeting when he began to feel ill. By morning, he felt certain he was seriously stricken and managed to call the GE offices. He was rushed to New York Hospital of Cornell Medical Center. A stroke had paralyzed his left leg and left arm but had not affected his speech or other faculties. Later, he was flown to the Indiana University Medical Center where he made rapid progress and began an intensive physical therapy program. “They almost made an I.U. fan out of me,” he says of the excellent care he received at University Hospital.

He returned to his Lafayette home in August, 1978, and resumed physical therapy under the direction of his close friend Dr. Loyal W. Combs, director of the Purdue University Student Hospital and Boilermaker team physician, and continues that regimen persistently.

On January 15, 1980, Priscilla Hovde died at the age of seventy-one of complications following hip surgery at Home Hospital, Lafayette, where she had been a patient two and a half months.

Although the hours may be anguished and the days bleak, often only the weft and warp of faith and courage remain to sustain human hope. Fred Hovde is of that fabric—the kind that John F. Kennedy may have had in mind when he wrote:

The courage of life is often a less dramatic spectacle than the courage of a final moment; but it is no less a magnificent mixture of triumph and tragedy. A man does what he must—in spite of personal consequences, in spite of obstacles and dangers and pressures—and that is the basis of all human morality.