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WVU Provost Maryanne Reed looks back on long career

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MORGANTOWN – From TV news reporter to journalism professor and j-school dean, to WVU provost, Maryanne Reed brought her natural curiosity and creativity to her life’s work.

“I always wanted to be a journalist,” she said. “As long as I remember, I wanted to tell stories. I’ve been a very curious person my whole life.”

Reed’s long career at WVU culminates Jan. 2, when she officially retires.

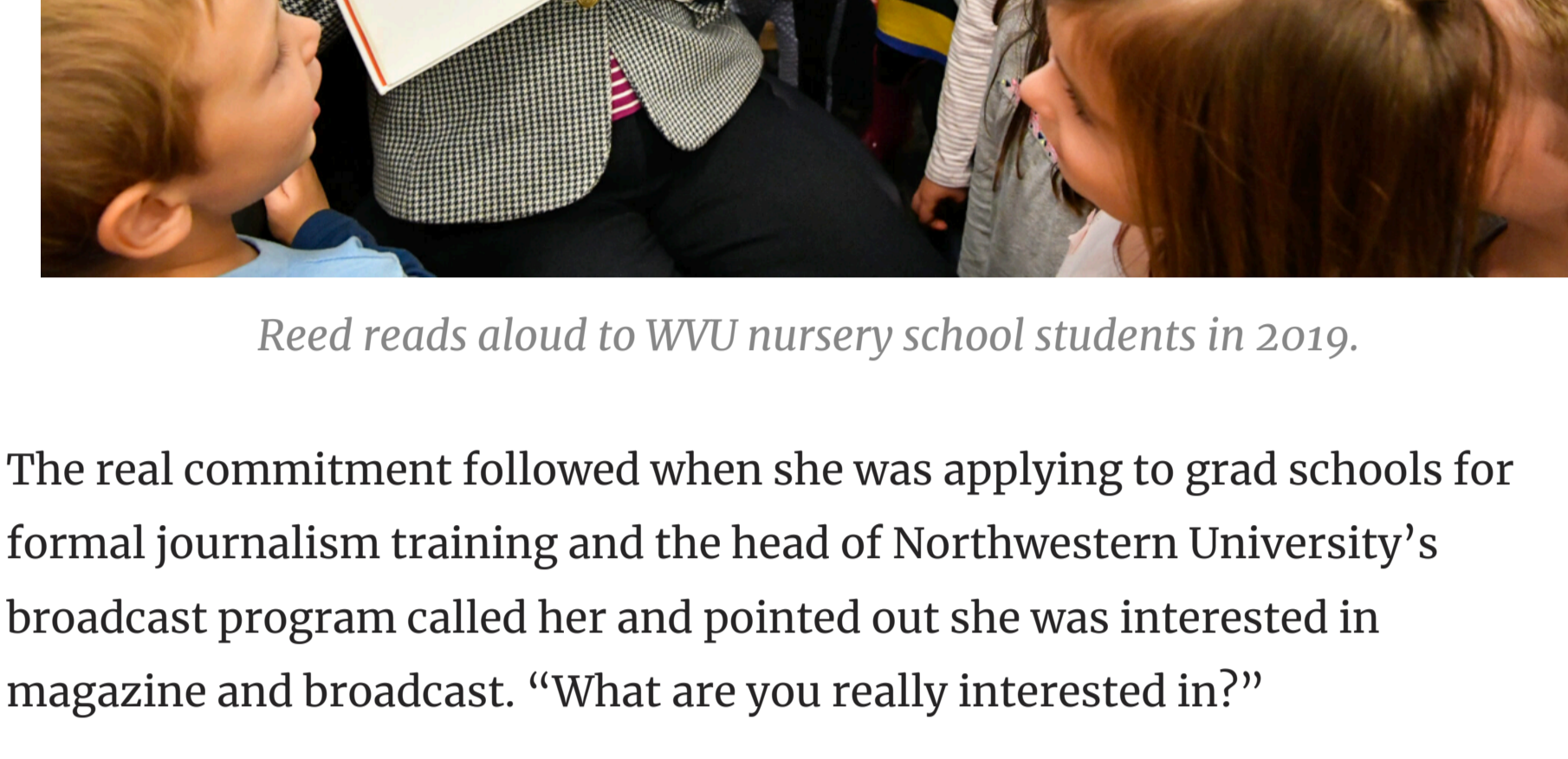
“I’ve been here 31 years, I’ve done everything,” she said. She accepted the job as provost in 2019, signing a five-year contract that comes to an end. WVU will have a new president in June who will want to hire their own provost.

“I felt that it was my time. Frankly I was ready to step down and re-envision my life a little bit with my husband and my family and my friends.”

Her first budding steps in the news business began during her undergraduate days at at University of Massachusetts Amherst, where she worked at the college radio station – picking up the wire copy and doing the “rip-and-read” over the airwaves.

She graduated in 1983. Bachelor’s degree in hand, she moved to Washington, D.C., and worked at George Washington University, doing some freelance work on the side.

The seminal career moment came when she did a 4.5-minute story for public radio on changes in public broadcasting. “That sort of really hooked me onto broadcast.”



Reed reads aloud to WVU nursery school students in 2019.

The real commitment followed when she was applying to grad schools for formal journalism training and the head of Northwestern University’s broadcast program called her and pointed out she was interested in magazine and broadcast. “What are you really interested in?”

She picked broadcast and received the one full-ride scholarship for the broadcast program.

Completing her training at Northwestern in 1987, she landed her first TV job in Elmira, N.Y., starting as a reporter and advancing to morning anchor.

The next career moment came in 1993, while working at a TV station in Rochester, N.Y. She heard someone talking about teaching a class. “There was something that just drew me to that.”

She was hired as an adjunct at SUNY Geneseo, teaching one class. “I absolutely fell in love with it. I loved the interaction with the students. I loved helping them find their passion, and the spark was lit.”

The next natural career step, she said, would be moving to a bigger TV market or teaching at a university. She chose the latter, and came to WVU in 1993. Initially working part time at WTAE TV in Pittsburgh, she realized she needed to make a full-time commitment to academia.

She taught in and then led the broadcast journalism program. Among her achievements, developing a partnership with KDKA TV for students to work as off-air reporters. And she pursued her own creative work crafting documentaries – a form of telling stories. “I really loved it.”

J-school dean

In 2004, Reed made her next career advancement, from professor to dean of the journalism school. She succeeded Chris Martin, who moved to a vice president’s position and did some friendly prodding.

All of her career steps followed a similar pattern, she said.

“I’m always happy with what I’m doing, and then someone comes along and says, ‘Why don’t you do this thing that’s new.’ And I’m scared and I don’t want to do it, and I do it and I fall in love with the next thing.”

She thought the dean’s position would be temporary, but she really enjoyed it. She liked the opportunity to lead people to create new programs that attract and benefit new students. Not uncommon for new leaders, management and personnel issues took some time as she moved from colleague to boss.

Reed led some significant changes in her role there. One, the school changed its name from the Perley Isaac Reed (no relation) School of Journalism to the Reed School of Media and Communications – reflecting a broader mission adapted to a new era. She led the development of the Integrated Marketing Communications master’s degree program.

“We evolved the school to be digital first and to be audience-centric,” Reed said. Students learned to tell stories across media, adjusting to the digital environment. “It was helping the program to evolve to be more relevant and modern.”

Journalism program enrollments were declining and they had to ask, “How do we appeal to the new generation of students.”

That led to new programs and new facilities, including the Media Innovation Center. “I’m really proud of the changes that we made in the college, and how we kept up and in many respects got ahead of the times.”

Diana Martinelli, now director of the Reed School of Media and Communications, praised Reed’s accomplishments.

“Maryanne was my boss for nearly 20 years,” she said, “and during that time she elevated our school to national prominence. She had the foresight to grow our online programs, help envision and build out our Media Innovation Center on Evansdale campus, invest in new programs and curricula and see the potential in others, many of whom have gone on to be award-winning teachers and leaders in media and higher education.”

President Gordon Gee also had warm words. “Her commitment to students and colleagues and her innovative spirit have been evident from her earliest days as a faculty member in the Perley Isaac Reed School of Journalism.”

Under her leadership as dean, the Reed College experienced record enrollment in its graduate and undergraduate programs, he said. And the Integrated Marketing Communications master’s degree program was first in the nation.

Provost

Reed was chosen to lead the Eberly College of Arts and Sciences as interim dean from 2015–2016. Her next career step came in 2019. “I never envisioned myself as a provost.” But Gee asked her and she took time to think about it. She’d been dean for 15 years.

“It was time for me to take on a new challenge. The idea of working with Gordon Gee to be basically his right hand person was pretty powerful, pretty appealing.” And there was her sense of duty and responsibility to the university.

But just seven short months after taking the job, the bomb fell across the nation: COVID.

“My background in journalism really helped.” She had experience in responding to breaking situations and dealing with what arose in the moment, having to make quick decisions, rallying people, doing what needed to be done, communicating with the community that they were being cared for and WVU was following the best science.

With COVID past, academic transformation rocked the campus in 2023. While the conversations about transformation began clear back in 2021, a projected \$45 million structural budget deficit and the need to transform WVU’s offerings for a new era led to process of cutting programs and faculty positions, which led to campus-wide anger and protests.

“It was very challenging and it was difficult,” Reed said. They were under pressure to make decisions for the long term success of the university and preserve WVU for the future. The Board of Governors wanted them to act quickly and respond to the projected structural deficit.

“From a personal standpoint it was very painful, because I know a lot of people in this community and I know people impacted by the decisions that we made. ... But I feel that we did the right thing in the right way given the time that we were given to do it.”

Transformation made national headlines. “We took a lot of heat from the national media because of what we did and because we’re West Virginia education,” Reed said. “It played into the narrative that we don’t care about education, we don’t care about this higher level of thinking.”

“I have a background in media and I understand narrative,” she said. “I understand that it fit into a narrative that we are a bunch of ignorant hillbillies that don’t care about education.”

There remains lingering bitterness, but also healing, she acknowledged. “As the other universities are going through this, and there are so many now, we were really the first to tackle it head on.”

Martinelli and Gee noted some of Reed’s accomplishments. While dean, she served as president of the national Association of Schools of Journalism and Mass Communications, and she was formally recognized for her innovative spirit, positive perspective and outstanding leadership when she received the Administrator of the Year award from the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication in 2016.

Martinelli said, “Maryanne’s energy, determination, persistence and sense of humor helped instill a sense of purpose in others. She was always open to new ideas and new ways of doing things, which served to inspire our faculty and staff. She will certainly be missed, but her influence remains.”

Gee said Reed assembled a talented team that created many student success initiatives, including the Maier Foundation-funded completion grants, the Claude Worthington Benedum Foundation-funded REACH program and the campus’ move to professional advising.

“Maryanne brought her unique brand of energy and a sense of purpose to every facet of her career,” he said. “Her retirement is a great loss for our community, but the stronger academic foundation she built will support all our future success.”

The future

What’s ahead for Reed?

“I really don’t know, and I’m very excited about that.”

She and her husband are outdoors enthusiasts – hiking, biking, traveling. “I love to bake. I’m an obsessive cookie baker.” She loves to write, especially personal narrative. And she has a passion for sharing healthy and engaged aging, helping other people find joy and fulfillment in their silver years.

She will remain in Morgantown. “I don’t have any plans to leave. We really love this area. I consider West Virginia to be my home and Morgantown to be my home.”

Summing it all up, she said, “I feel very fortunate in my career. I have been given every opportunity to grow and to learn at this institution. I’m very loyal to WVU as a result and I want this university to thrive well into the future. I’m leaving on the best note possible.”

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Author: David Beard, The Dominion Post

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