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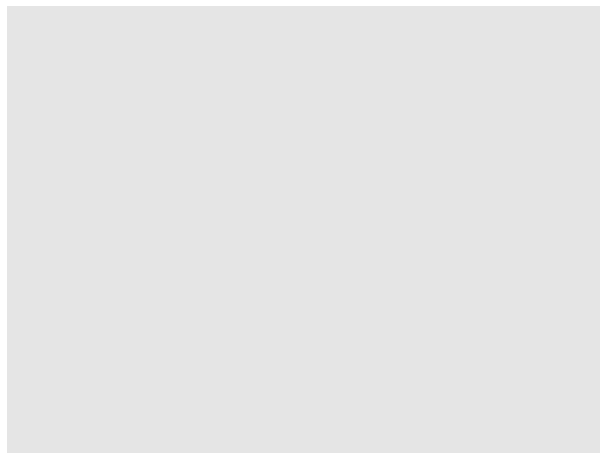
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Barbara Burch, former WKU provost, faculty

regent, dies

By AARON MUDD amudd@bgdailynews.com

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Barbara Burch

Barbara Burch, who served as Western Kentucky University's provost for more than a decade, represented faculty on WKU's Board of Regents and most recently chaired the WKU Sisterhood, has died.

WKU spokesman Bob Skipper and former WKU President Gary Ransdell – who promoted Burch to provost in 1997 when he began his tenure at WKU – confirmed Burch's death Sunday, with Ransdell offering condolences to Burch's family on behalf of himself and his wife.

“From Julie and me both, our hearts go out to her family,” Ransdell said, also extending his sympathies to the broader WKU family.

“Our hearts go out to everybody who had the opportunity to be engaged with her,” he said.

Ransdell told the Daily News that Burch's unexpected death was the result of a fall at her home.

Burch held the role of overseeing the university's academic life – including instruction, research and public service – until 2010. Burch later served as faculty regent on WKU's Board of Regents before her term ended in 2017.

Burch is also credited with creating the Kelly M. Burch Institute for Transformative Practices in Higher Education, which opened in April 2018. The institute, named in honor of her late daughter, focused on examining policies and practices that impact student success, including retention and graduation, according to a university news release announcing the institute's grand opening.

In 2019, Burch chaired the WKU Sisterhood, a group of women who pool their financial gifts to award a limited number of projects at the university each year. During last year's Homecoming festivities, Burch was among the inaugural recipients of the WKU Summit of Excellence awards, receiving the Outstanding Faculty Excellence in Philanthropy award, a news release said.

Burch was a professor in WKU's School of Teacher Education before entering retirement. Ransdell heard the news of her death early Sunday, he said.

"It was quite a surprise," he said.

"We worked extremely well together," Ransdell said, describing Burch

as “brilliant” and “extremely hardworking,” with the drive of someone younger than her years.

After appointing Burch as provost, Ransdell said he was always able to rest easy knowing the academic life of the university was in good hands.

Together at the helm of WKU, Burch and Ransdell tackled many new initiatives. Ransdell described Burch’s passion for helping create the Kelly Autism Program and the Suzanne Vitale Clinical Education Complex. It would go on to offer many programs to support families and children affected by autism, developmental delays and disabilities.

As a professor, she also forever changed the lives of her students, Ransdell said.

“I know that she was a great mentor to many students,” he said.

John Ridley, who served on WKU’s Board of Regents with Burch, described her thorough knowledge of education issues and openness to fresh ideas.

Ridley recalled that she embodied an “entrepreneurial spirit” and a sense of collegiality and cooperation among her peers. Though they sometimes had differences of opinion, Ridley said, “at the end of the decision we were still friends.”

“She had a passion for Western Kentucky University,” he said.

WKU spokesman Bob Skipper said Burch's family was making arrangements for her funeral but was unable to offer additional details Sunday.

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Aaron Mudd

Education reporter. Covers education and related issues, focusing primarily on the Bowling Green and Warren County public school districts and Western Kentucky University.