

The House that Jack Built

If ever an institution were, as Ralph Waldo Emerson surmised, “the lengthened shadow of one man,” the New England Board of Higher Education (NEBHE) is the shadow of Jack Hoy, who this year marks his 20th anniversary as the board’s chief executive.

John C. Hoy became president of NEBHE in 1978 after serving for a decade as vice chancellor for university and student affairs at the University of California, Irvine.

Raised in Yonkers, N.Y., the son of a sheriff, Hoy developed strong connections with New England before heading west to Irvine in 1969. He graduated from Wesleyan University and went on to serve there as dean for special academic affairs, dean of admissions and freshmen, and assistant to the president. (He also served stints as director of admissions at Lake Forest College and as the first dean of admissions at Swarthmore College.)

Upon returning to New England in 1978, Hoy wasted no time focusing NEBHE—and indeed the six-state region—on the vital relationship between higher education and economic well-being. He started by prodding stubbornly independent New England bankers, college presidents, labor officials, professors, publishers and business leaders to work together on a Commission on Higher Education and the Economy of New England. In time, the panel would issue the benchmark report *A Threat to Excellence*, calling for a variety of partnerships among New England colleges, secondary schools and businesses.

In the years to follow, Hoy elevated the collaborative formula to an art form, issuing follow-up reports and co-editing three books on New England higher education and the regional economy with his transplanted California colleague Mel Bernstein. First came *Business and Academia: Partners in New England’s Economic Renewal*, followed by *New England’s Vital Resource: The Labor Force* and *Financing Higher Education: The Public Investment*.

Displaying the prescience that has marked his tenure at NEBHE, Hoy in 1983

commissioned NEBHE’s monograph on *Higher Education Telecommunications: A New England Policy Imperative*—a full decade before the “distance learning” phenomenon swept over higher education.

As the region basked in the economic “miracle” of the mid-1980s, Hoy was one of the few voices urging leaders to resist complacency and to extend the benefits of the economic renaissance (which he reckoned to be temporary) to all New Englanders.

In 1987, he again persuaded leaders of business, government and education to prioritize the issues that would be critical to the region’s prosperity and helped set an ambitious agenda under the rubric of the *Future of New England*.

Around the same time, he helped establish the New England South African Student Scholarship Program, enabling New England colleges to support black South African students at “open universities” in South Africa—the beginning of a global outreach that would flourish at NEBHE near the end of the decade.

In 1988, Hoy appointed a Commission on Academic Medical Centers and the Economy of New England to explore the promise of emerging biotechnology industries and devise ways to encourage biotech manufacturing in New England—an obviously engaging challenge for the only humanist I know who actually *reads* the articles in *Science* magazine, molecular structures and all.

As the ’80s turned to the ’90s, Hoy took the show on the road, briefing legislators in the six state capitals on the internationalization of higher education and the economy. He closed the decade by guiding another commission, this one charged with exploring legal education, law practice and the New England economy. As always, he pushed the members—mostly lawyers—to “stir the pot.” They ultimately conceded in their chief finding that growth in the legal profession has not worked to curb legal costs, reach more middle-class and poor people or ensure professional competence.

In the 1990s, Hoy committed the board to

forward-looking environmental education programs, created the New England Technical Education Partnership to improve New England's two-year college programs and support emerging industries, and initiated NEBHE's Regional Project on Telecommunications and Distance Learning to clarify the opportunities presented by rapidly advancing educational technologies. He has recently convened regionwide discussions of issues ranging from the impact of college arts programs on New England communities to the challenges of electricity deregulation.

All the while, a parade of colleagues and guests, distinguished leaders, Young Turks, do-gooders and charlatans streams into Hoy's office with propositions of one sort or another. Hoy emerges from behind a desk strewn with newspapers, reports and family photos, sinks into a soft chair and lights his pipe as if to signal that he's in no hurry. He wanders seemingly irretrievably into a recollection of Wesleyan days or his children's antics on Cape Rosier or higher education in Panama or sheep farming or the blues scene on Martha's Vineyard, then—Zing!—*What's in it for New England higher education? What's in it for New Englanders?*

If there's a good answer, he's with you all the way, more than happy to raise a ragtag New England army to fight for your cause. If not, you got some damn good stories and infectious laughter—at no charge.

If illuminating and enhancing the relationship between higher education and economic welfare is Hoy's craft, his commitment to expanded educational opportunity—partic-

ularly for disadvantaged populations—is pure instinct.

At Wesleyan, he quietly revolutionized the way America's most selective higher education institutions recruit African-American students. In 1989, he returned to the theme, initiating NEBHE's acclaimed *Equity and Pluralism* project designed to ensure greater participation and success among African-Americans,

newspaper clipping with no regard for the words beneath.

"J.O.H.—*This deserves coverage in CONNECTION.* ...

"J.O.H.—*Let's get the New England data on this and compare to U.S.* ...

"J.O.H.—*I admitted this guy to Wesleyan.* ..."

Today's NEBHE is indeed the house that Jack built.

Yet somehow, between all the initiatives and a dizzying schedule of conferences and speaking engagements, Hoy has patiently given his time to jumpstart careers and offer heartfelt support and practical advice to staff and colleagues in the midst of personal transitions, while raising a fabulous family of his own. It is a constant source of gratification—and occasional annoyance—to his staff that he refuses to shunt aside phone calls or give visitors the bum's rush. His considerable intellect aside, it is Jack Hoy's heart that seems bigger than life.

So here's to the longest-serving president in NEBHE's 40-year history—a man who has dedicated his professional life to the causes of expanded higher education oppor-

tunity, interstate cooperation and the economic development of New England. He has lived by the words of Theodore Roosevelt, which hang outside his office: "Far better it is to dare mighty things, to win glorious triumphs even though checkered by failure, than to rank with those spirits who neither enjoy nor suffer much because they live in the gray twilight that knows neither victory nor defeat."

John O. Harney is executive editor of *CONNECTION*.



Institutional Memory. Hoy (center) poses with some of NEBHE's past chairs. From left to right: Former Newport, R.I., mayor and six-term Rhode Island state senator Robert J. McKenna, who now chairs the Rhode Island Higher Education Assistance Authority; former New Hampshire governor and long-time president of Franklin Pierce College Walter Peterson, who now serves as interim chancellor of the New Hampshire Technical College System; former Maine Senate Majority Leader Bennett D. Katz; Robert E. Miller, founding president of Connecticut's Quinebaug Valley Community College; Hoy; Brown University Professor Eleanor M. McMahon, who served as Rhode Island's first commissioner of higher education; Robert L. Woodbury, director of the John W. McCormack Institute of Public Affairs at the University of Massachusetts Boston and former chancellor of the University of Maine System; Connecticut Higher Education Commissioner Andrew G. De Rocco; and Robert W. Eisenmenger, former vice president of the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston.

Hispanics and Native Americans in New England higher education and the educated workforce.

My personal knowledge of Hoy's leadership revolves primarily around this journal, which he created in 1986. Since then, he has zealously guarded *CONNECTION*'s integrity and shaped its content, often delivering to my desk story ideas scrawled in every direction on a series of well-worn napkins from Locke-Ober or notes scribbled right across the text of a magazine or