

# From mature student to alumni head

When Alumni Association President Gary Weese came to London from his native Chatham in 1964, a university education was little more than a dream.

"In 1964 I never thought I'd be an alumnus, let alone where I am now," said Weese, the first person to become President of the Alumni Association who obtained a degree as a mature student through the Faculty of Part-time and Continuing Education.

In 1966, Weese joined the London Fire Department where he now holds the rank of Fire Captain. He enrolled at Western in 1969, taking courses part-time for nine years and graduating in 1978 with a BA in Political Science with a minor concentration in Psychology. Weese also took the diploma program in Public Administration during Intercession of 1978.

"I really believe those years benefitted me in my growth and personal development," said Weese.

Like many students coming back to education after a long absence, Weese had some initial fears about whether he could make it. He credits the encouragement of University administrators and some dynamic and interesting professors with sparking his enthusiasm. One of those professors, for a required first-year English credit, was current Provost (Vice-President Academic) Thomas J. Collins.

"He made things so interesting in that first year that I said 'Boy, if this is what University is about, I want more of it.'"

Weese's involvement in the Alumni Association began in 1981 when he saw an item in the *Alumni Gazette* calling for volunteers to help with the Western Alumni Students Advisors (WASA) program.

WASA puts alumni in touch with students registering for first year at Western who live in their geographical area. The alumni offer themselves as sources of

non-academic information about the University. In some larger centres such as Calgary, Edmonton and Vancouver, WASA alumni also organize events such as Off to Western Parties for students heading for Western in September.

In 1983, Weese was asked by Alumni President Dr. Bob Beath if he would consider standing for nomination to the Alumni Board of Directors. Weese said he had not given the idea much thought, "but I've always liked a new challenge so I said 'Yes, sure, I'll consider it.'"

In March 1984, Weese was nominated to the Board of Directors and in 1986 he was President of the Alumni Association's London branch.

Becoming president of an association of volunteers is not like being a chief administrator for other kinds of entities, said

Weese. Unlike the president of a corporation, for example, he does not see himself as personally setting the goals and agenda of the association.

"I look at the president of the association as a facilitator and coordinator," said Weese. "I found the association in excellent condition and I want to leave it that way."

But Weese did outline some of the long-term goals of the Alumni Association. Last year, the association received a long-range plan outlining a vision of its future as a representative of one of the four key pillars of the University. The other pillar communities are faculty, students, and staff.

Two key task forces arose out of the report's recommendations: one committee is looking into how the Association can better promote itself; the other is look-

ing at whether the Alumni Affairs Offices are an appropriate place in the basement of Alumni Hall.

Weese said the findings of these task forces are being studied together with other recommendations of the long-range report which seek a more visible association and a more committed alumni.

"Both task force reports were excellent and gave us a lot of good recommendations for the future," said Weese.

Another issue that will have to be addressed in the long term by the association is its far-flung and growing base of alumni, said Weese. In particular, this means that more efforts will have to be made to strengthen the branch chapters of the Alumni Association.

"They keep the spirit alive out there and don't get nearly enough recognition."