

Pichini makes history as new Board Chairman

Kutztown graduate first PASSHE alumnus to lead governing body

Guido M. Pichini made history when he was elected chair of the Board of Governors of the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education in June. PASSHE's fourth Board chair in 28 years, Mr. Pichini is the first to have graduated from one of the 14 State System universities, earning a degree in political science from what was then Kutztown State College in 1974.

"I am extremely proud to be the first alumnus to serve as Board chair," he said. "It means a lot to me individually, and I think it's a huge opportunity for the System. I've been to all of the campuses. I've worked for a number of years with the foundations and the trustees. I know all of the various constituencies."

While each of the prior Board chairs – F. Eugene Dixon Jr., Charles A. Gomulka and Kenneth M. Jarin – were "extremely intelligent men who did a tremendous job for the System," having someone who comes into the position intimately familiar with each of the campuses will be beneficial as PASSHE seeks to navigate difficult waters ahead, said Mr. Pichini.

PASSHE is at a crossroads in its history, according to Mr. Pichini. Faced with unprecedented fiscal challenges, it will be incumbent upon the System leadership to find ways to help PASSHE "regroup, restructure and become stronger in the future," he said.

PASSHE universities pride themselves on promoting student success. Mr. Pichini is one of those successes.

His father and grandfather spent most of their lives working in the hosiery and steel mills in Reading. His grandfather came to America from Italy. Mr. Pichini, his brother and his sister all went to college (his sister, to Shippensburg University) – at their parents' insistence. All have had successful careers.

Mr. Pichini is president and CEO of Security Guards Inc., and its subsidiaries, WSK and Associates Consulting Group and Vigilant Security Services Inc. He served two terms as a borough councilman and four as mayor of Wyomissing Hills, and has been appointed to numerous boards of directors of community and civic organizations and previously chaired both the Kutztown University Council of Trustees and the Pennsylvania Association of Councils of Trustees (PACT), which comprises the trustees from each of the 14 PASSHE universities.

"I truly believe the System reaches out and makes it possible for students who would not otherwise go to college, for financial or other reasons, to get a quality education and to become leaders," Mr. Pichini said. "I'm a perfect example."



High school tennis player chooses Kutztown over ESU

Mr. Pichini was a tennis player at Reading High School. He planned to continue playing in college, but not at KU.

“I wasn’t even going to go to Kutztown. I was going to go to East Stroudsburg,” he said. “Back then (ESU) had a really good team; third in the nation, I think. I was going to be the last man on the team – No. 6.”

The night before he was to leave for East Stroudsburg, he got a call from the tennis coach at Kutztown, who offered him more scholarship money, and, likely, a higher spot on the team. Because KU was only 20 minutes from his home in Reading, it would make his commute much easier – he already was working full-time as the assistant club manager at the Reading Racquet Club.

“I tried to schedule my classes Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays so I would have Tuesdays and Thursdays at the club,” Mr. Pichini said. “I’d close the place at 1:30 a.m. and at 8 the next morning would be in class.”

Mr. Pichini had started playing tennis as part of an inner city youth league in Reading, where, if you showed up enough times, you got to keep your racquet. As a young teen, he gave tennis lessons at the Berks County Tennis Club and then, when the Reading Racquet Club opened, went to work there.

He was only 14 at the time.

By the time he was ready to graduate from high school, he was on Spalding’s “free” list, meaning he got all of his equipment free from the company. He planned to go to work for Spalding as a sales representative and play in some tournaments after graduation.

His father and mother would have none of that.

“My father went through the roof,” Mr. Pichini said. “He met with the company representative and told him, ‘My son’s going to college.’ ”

Mr. Pichini’s father wanted better for his children than the life he had working in a mill. “My father took each of us – my brother, my sister and me – to watch him work for a day so we could see what he did. Then he told us, ‘This is why you go college.’ ”

As a commuter student, Mr. Pichini did not participate in many campus activities while at Kutztown. He did make a number of close friendships with other students who also commuted to classes, and retains many of those friendships today. After graduation, he said, he “got lost by KU.” In fact, he really heard nothing from the university for about a decade.

Back in touch in a big way

“After I got into business, I received an invitation to the Decision Makers Forum,” he said, referring to the university’s popular speaker series that ran for two decades and featured several former U.S. presidents and other world leaders. “I accepted and wrote back a note thanking them for finally finding me,” he said.

After receiving the letter, William Sutton, then vice president for advancement at KU, made quick contact with Mr. Pichini and asked him to help out with some fundraising for the university’s foundation. Mr. Pichini readily accepted, helping raise funds for a variety of purposes, including student scholarships.

A few years later, he sought and was appointed to a seat on the university's Council of Trustees, and has served ever since, including as Council Chair.

"That seems to be the way things go with me. No matter where I go, I get involved," he said.

Not long after his father died, Mr. Pichini went to the chapel of the mausoleum where he was interred. He ended up on the cemetery and mausoleum's advisory board. After attending performances of the Reading Symphony Orchestra on Sunday afternoons for a while, he was asked to join its Board of Directors and eventually served a term as vice president.

While he sought the seat on the Council of Trustees, his initial appointment to the Board of Governors in 2005 came "out of the blue," he said. After a brief time off the Board following the completion of his first term, Mr. Pichini was reappointed last year, thanks in part to Mr. Jarin, his predecessor as Board Chair. The two have become the "best of friends" since joining the Board together, even though they haven't always seen eye to eye on every issue, Mr. Pichini said.

That's what makes the Board of Governors work, according to Mr. Pichini. While individual members might not always agree with each other, all are committed to doing what they believe is in the best interest of the System and its nearly 120,000 students. "They are such a professional group of people," he said.

Difficult challenges lie ahead

The Board will face many more tough decisions in the months and years ahead, according to Mr. Pichini. He said he would like to have the same kind of relationship with other constituencies associated with PASSHE as he has with his fellow Board members. While there will always be disagreements, that doesn't mean you can't work together, he said.

The universities and their foundations will have to work harder to raise private funds on behalf of students and the institutions. More effort needs to be made to reach out to successful alumni from all of the universities, both for financial and vocal support.

"We have a lot of successful alumni," Mr. Pichini said. "We need to take advantage of that."

Mr. Pichini is certainly one of those successes. He began his professional career as a police officer in West Lawn in Berks County, a job that paid \$7,500, or about \$1,000 more than he could have made as a school teacher at the time. He also worked as a county detective and served as an evidence technician while processing crime scenes (think early CSI).

Later he was one of 12 agents hired by the state Attorney General's Office to work in a new division in Philadelphia. When funding didn't come through for the new positions, all were immediately laid off. That led to Mr. Pichini answering an ad in the newspaper and going to work for the security agency he now runs.

Looking back, it's all a little overwhelming.

"Being a kid from inner-city Reading whose grandparents came from Italy and whose father worked two jobs in order to educate his children, to have a chance to be chairman of the Board of Governors is just humbling," he said. "I'm sure my grandparents and my father are smiling."