

City celebrates legacy of Davis and Gallaudet



A line of well-wishers wraps around the inside of the U.S. Bicycling Hall of Fame in downtown Davis on Friday to bid adieu to retiring Davis Enterprise Editor/Assistant Publisher Debbie Davis and Sports Editor Bruce Gallaudet as the couple heads into retirement. Fred Gladdis/ Courtesy photos

Local News

By Anne Ternus-Bellamy

Neither cold nor heavy rain could keep hundreds of Davis residents away from a last chance to bid farewell to two local icons Friday evening.

Almost as soon as the retirement celebration for outgoing Davis Enterprise editor Debbie Davis and sports editor Bruce Gallaudet began at the U.S. Bicycling Hall of Fame, a line of well-wishers was backing up out the door, patiently waiting for a last handshake, hug and thank you. Some 400 people in all turned out for the celebration.

That happens when you spend 39 years serving as both the message board and voice of a community as this husband-and-wife team did.

“I hope you see the affection that this community has for you,” Mayor Robb Davis told them. “As you go, know that you’re going with our love and gratitude.”

The mayor and others spoke not only of the fundamental role Davis and Gallaudet played at The Enterprise, but also the role The Enterprise under their stewardship has played in the life and history of this town.

“I tell people wherever I travel ... we have the quintessential local newspaper,” the mayor said.

“People say, ‘Robb, how do I keep up with what’s going on in this city?’ and with the proliferation of social media, still the best place to go to learn about what’s going on in the city is The Enterprise.”

To Davis and Gallaudet, he said, “I hope that you’ll leave here understanding and knowing that this city appreciates deeply the effort you made to tell us the truth about our lives and tell the stories of our families and our neighborhoods, to raise the profile of our children and to just give us a place we can go to find out the great things that are happening in our community.”

Following the mayor, Yolo County Supervisor Don Saylor noted the rarity of a sporting event in the city or on the UC Davis campus that Gallaudet was not present over the last four decades.

And the way he covered those athletes, Saylor said, from the youngest Little Leaguers to the college stars, always took into account their age and developmental ability.

As for Davis, Saylor said, “those of us in the community who have interacted with Debbie on public policy issues or the challenges of the times know that she absorbs the events, the victories of our community, the triumphs as well as our challenges ... the things that have torn our community apart... (and) she moves through them with a sense of grace and community.

“She’s accurate, she’s fair... and we’re going to miss both of you and we’re going to miss your brand of journalism in our community.”

Saylor’s colleague on the Board of Supervisors, Jim Provenza, called The Enterprise under Davis and Gallaudet “the glue that cements our community.”

“I think that as an elected official, it’s so important that people understand what we’re doing and why we’re doing it and that there’s someone to hold us to task if we don’t do it right.”

To Davis he said, “You have made sure that everyone’s voice is heard, that everybody knows everything that’s going on in the community and that we do our job, and if we don’t, you’re there to remind us.”

In addition to receiving resolutions from the city and county, Davis and Gallaudet were also presented Friday evening with resolutions from the offices of Assemblywoman Cecilia Aguiar-Curry, D-Winters; Sen. Bill Dodd, D-Napa, and Rep. John Garamendi, D-Walnut Grove, and recognition from UC Davis as well, all for their 40 years of contributions to the city.



Davis Enterprise stalwarts Debbie Davis and Bruce Gallaudet address the crowd Friday night that came to bid them farewell on their retirement. Fred Gladdis/Courtesy photo

Building the paper

Davis and Gallaudet only ended up in Davis back in 1979 because Foy McNaughton, who took over as publisher that year, needed to replace the recently departed editor.

He was encouraged by a colleague to bring Davis and Gallaudet on board, he said, “and I got them.”

“In a very short period of time,” McNaughton said, “I realized that I had two superstars. Together, we were determined to build The Davis Enterprise into a tremendous newspaper.”

Back in 1979, McNaughton said, the Woodland Daily Democrat was the most powerful newspaper in town, with its own Davis edition.

The Enterprise, on the other hand, was disliked by just about everybody.

“I told Debbie, ‘I want (the Woodland paper) out of town. This is our town. ... I want us to cover all the news, all the time, and I want you to build a great staff,’ and that’s what we did, and Debbie did, and we ran (the Woodland paper) out of town.

“We built a local newspaper ... the paper of the town, where everybody had an opportunity to have a say,” McNaughton said. “For almost 40 years, Debbie has been right there, every second. She has led this newspaper.”



Hundreds braved the rainy weather Friday night and crammed into a tent outside the National Bicycling Hall of Fame to say farewell to Davis and Gallaudet. Fred Gladdis/Enterprise photo

Thankful and proud

Davis and Gallaudet ended the evening with emotional remarks of their own.

“This has been the most humbling thing,” Gallaudet said. “One of the true delights of these 40 years in Davis is that everyone truly does have a story.”

Gallaudet’s own story in Davis went beyond his Enterprise job, of course — he didn’t just write about sports; year after year he coached hundreds of local youths in rec leagues, and recalled the names of many of them Friday night.

Meanwhile, his own two children benefitted from similar efforts by others.

“The two things I’m most proud of in my 40 years here ... is that my son, Nick, and daughter, Julie, are two people that I can be so dang proud of.

“They are the best and it’s because of so many of you that they had that opportunity to become who they are.”

Davis called the evening — as well as the many smaller farewell events over the last month or two — “incredibly overwhelming.”

“This farewell tour we’ve been on has been so life-affirming,” she said.

Known for the long hours she put in at the paper day after day, Davis would tell her staff, “You’ll find me dead at my desk one morning. Just pick me up and carry me out.”

“At some point,” she said Friday, “Bruce and I realized that we don’t want to die at our desks. It was hard for me to come to that realization.”

Now they continue their journey together, heading to the Bay Area to be closer to their daughter and young grandson.

“We’re a team and I couldn’t have done this without him by my side all this time,” Davis said.

“I couldn’t have dreamed of a better way to have lived out my life.”

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