

OUR “NEW” PRESIDENT: DR. MURRAY BROCKMAN



By Jacqueline Tobin

In the early months of this year, Dr. Brockman, president of GSSM since 2001, announced his planned retirement after the Class of 2015's graduation; from then, the Governor's School began a search for a new president. The position was extended to one of the three candidates brought on campus for two-day-long interviews; however, this person declined the offer. So Dr. Brockman may not be retiring as soon as planned, but he is still looking forward to have time to do nothing. He doesn't have many hobbies such as golf, fishing, or tennis, but he does enjoy target shooting, hiking, and traveling with his wife—they plan to spend a lot of time around Boston where his grandchildren live. Dr. Brockman considers work to be his play, which is a good attitude to have, considering he has been working essentially full time since he was fifteen years old.

His first job was as a stock boy at a grocery store in his hometown of Greer, South Carolina, where he would work four days per

week from the hours of 6pm to 4am. The hours sound grueling, but this is far from what Dr. Brockman considers his hardest job. The summer after he graduated high school, he needed to save money for college, so he and his brother drove to Walla Walla, Washington, where they worked in a pea cannery and with a wheat harvest. They worked from 7am to 7pm, seven days a week, and lived in a boarding house.

The wheat farm was where Dr. Brockman had his scariest experience: He was working with the conveyor belt that scooped the wheat into a storage tower when he heard the something jam. He took the elevator up to check on the motor that ran the conveyor belt, and it was still running. The motor was running so hard from trying to move the jammed conveyor belt that it broke the brackets holding it into the ground and jumped straight up into the air—barely missing Dr. Brockman.

This experience, and another working in the pea cannery, taught

him valuable lessons about safety. Working in the pea cannery, Dr. Brockman monitored a machine that pushed the cans of peas into a cardboard box. If a can was even slightly tilted, the machine would smash the can, spraying peas everywhere. As a clever 17 year old, Dr. Brockman figured out how to spot the tilted cans, reach his hand in to adjust them, and prevent the can from being smashed.

His manager, Dutch, a short statured man with an even shorter temper, saw Dr. Brockman perform his new trick. Concerned for the safety of his workers—or maybe scared by the prospect of filling out the paperwork required if an accident occurred—lifted Dr. Brockman over the conveyor belt by his shirt and slammed him against the wall. The message was clear: the new trick wasn't safe. Dr. Brockman remembered this lesson, and was able to apply it to his plant management position at DuPont later in life. One of his proudest life accomplishments was the four years his DuPont fac-

tory went without an accident.

Dr. Brockman's wife and family moved fourteen times for his job at DuPont. Each time he moved, he was always very involved in the local school systems; in North Carolina, for example, he was on the Governor's Commission for Education. Immediately after college, before earning his PhD in Chemistry, he taught science at a high school, but he had no administrative experience before GSSM.

When applying for the position of president in 2001, Dr. Brockman wasn't sure if he would fit into the school. However, when he met with a group of students, he decided he wanted the job. He spent the first few months as president talking with constituents of the school about what would be best for the students, staff, universities, the public, and businesses. He established seven goals for GSSM in those first few months, a few of which included expansion, moving the location out of Coker College, fostering a better relationship with alumni, expanding publicity and public awareness of the school, developing new programs, and attracting new faculty. Dr. Brockman expected these goals to be completed within three years, but didn't meet all of them (except one, which he chose to not disclose) until 2013—that's when he decided to retire.

Dr. Brockman described his role as president as "anticipating the future and positioning us to excel." He is always thinking years out from

the present, which he attributes to why he occasionally forgets when there are soccer games! To best prepare for the future and work towards the benefit of South Carolina, he has to meet with a lot of people and talk about ideas. The rearrangement of pieces, absence of routine, ability to bring people together, and working with these ideas to create things is his favorite part of the job. This was another reason for his retirement—Dr. Brockman recognizes that GSSM will need fresh new ideas in order to keep moving forward.

Dr. Brockman considers the success of the students the real success of the school. Many alumni have earned PhDs and MDs, and there are thirteen working at MUSC. He is most prideful about the people GSSM has been able to help by expanding their capabilities.

From reading a book about Steve Jobs he learned that "everything you do becomes material for what you're going to do by preparing your mind by giving ideas and direction." Dr. Brockman's past experiences working in a pea cannery, a grocery store, in a wheat field, as a milk delivery boy, as a teacher, and as a plant manager all helped prepare him to be President of GSSM.

For the next president, the school is "looking for someone better than me...I'm just a totally ordinary guy," Dr. Brockman says. In addition to being an ordinary guy, Dr. Brockman has the unique ability to listen to others and get them to do what they thought they couldn't. Not

everyone has agreed with Dr. Brockman's ideas over the last fourteen years, but they've always disagreed for the right reasons: it's never personal and everyone always has the school's best interests in mind. Just as his approach in the past may have been different than others, it would have been different had Dr. Brockman given a presentation on "The Future of STEM Education."

Dr. Brockman would have mixed all three presidential candidates' approaches, started with a survey of what new approaches he should be considering, and focused on the central problem of higher education: how to integrate deep personally acquired knowledge into the broad understanding of a discipline. He recognizes that the ideal way to learn is through experimentation, but students can't learn everything about a discipline that is relevant today in just one semester. However, the better GSSM does it the more attractive students are to colleges.

Heading a school like GSSM isn't a job you come to because you need a job—you come because you think you can actually do something to contribute. Dr. Brockman has led GSSM since 2001 and the school has undergone drastic expansion—accomplishing all but one of his goals. Given more time as President, he plans to continue working on this last goal and getting to know the incoming juniors.