

# Dero Downings Settle In As Western's First Family

By ED RYAN

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BOWLING GREEN, Ky. — A hesitant smile crosses the face of Mrs. Harriet Downing when she is asked about moving to the president's home on the Western Kentucky University campus.

—It's a smile that says, "Why did you have to ask that question?"

"I have mixed emotions about moving," conceded the wife of Dero G. Downing, Western's new president, in an interview at the Downings' sprawling two-story brick home in the Bowling Green suburbs.

The Downings were among the first residents in the Highland Avenue area when they "settled" there 22 years ago after Downing first became associated with the university's training school.

## Moved 10 Years Ago

After living in a smaller home—now occupied by Downing's mother—they moved to their present home (next door) about 10 years ago and it has become a happy and comfortable haven for the Downing clan and for dozens of Downing relatives who frequently visit from neighboring Barren, Monroe and Allen counties.

The recreational room where Downing relaxes in a friendly pool game with basketball coach Johnny Oldham and other Western faculty and staff members will be hard to leave. And the den in the basement provides considerable enjoyment for the entire family, especially for the three children in Bowling Green—Ann, a freshman at Western; Elizabeth, a sixth grader; and Alex, an irrepressible 4-year-old who delights in beating spoons against pans in the upstairs kitchen.

Neighborhood lies, built over two

decades, are close and parting will not be easy.

But Downing's elevation to the presidency last summer, after Dr. Kelly Thompson resigned, has by necessity caused some changes in the Downings' life on Highland Avenue.

So they will take up residence at the more austere, three-story president's home on the campus around the first of the year.

## Will Keep Present House

"It's a very nice home and we're moving some pieces of furniture there," explained Mrs. Downing, a cheerful dark-brunette. However, they presently intend to keep the suburban home so when their two oldest children, Kathryn (Mrs. Elvin Smith Jr.) of Elizabethtown, and Dee (Dero) of Louisville, and their families come in they'll have a place to stay. Mrs. Downing also left the impression that the Downings may spend some time there themselves—they definitely plan on having all the children back home for the Christmas season.

There have been other changes since Downing became Western's fourth president.

"I'm one of these people who like to be home five days a week and gone for one or two," Harriet Downing said the other day. "It's been just the reverse lately."

## Brags on Wife

On a recent week, Downing and his wife were in Atlanta, Ga., for three days at an educational meeting, then home one day, and gone the next day to Frankfort for a meeting of the State Council on Public Higher Education.

"I feel much more responsibility now than I normally did" when Downing was

vice president of administrative affairs, Mrs. Downing said.

Although she disclaims any extra talent in the area, Downing brags on his wife as "a very good speaker." She adds that "anybody that talks as much as I do, should be, I guess."

Before low-haired Alex came on the scene, Harriet Downing used to teach a Sunday school class at the United States Street Methodist Church here and was active in the Women's Missionary circles.

The Downings continue to take an active part in their church, but young children and university responsibilities have limited their participation in some areas.

Mrs. Downing, who didn't cook until she married "a man who liked to eat" now "likes to stay in the kitchen and work with recipes."

## Pie Is a Favorite

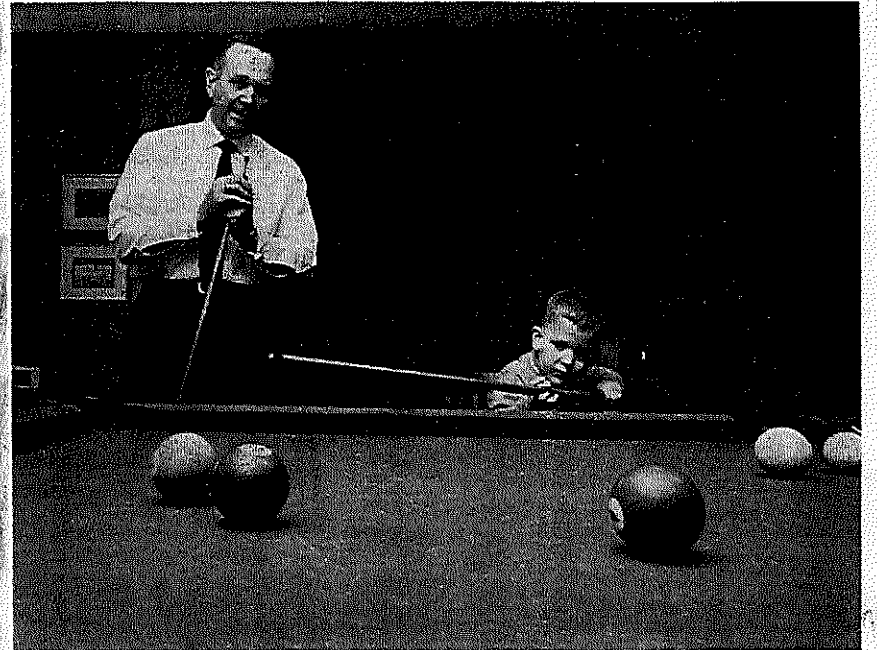
Her husband professed a real liking for her shrimp casserole and "French silk pie"—a chocolate ice box pie with a meringue crust. While talking to a visitor recently she effortlessly whipped up a batch of peanut butter candy while carrying on a running conversation.

But cooking frequently has to take back seat to her duties as Western's "first lady." Such events as alumni banquets, football banquets and similar affairs tend to take her out of the kitchen more.

"I find an increased necessity to meet new people," according to Mrs. Downing, who came from her native Arkansas and met her husband at the then Western Kentucky State Teachers College.

She has been very active in the faculty wives' organization on campus, a group which tries to draw new wives of faculty members into the university circle.

"We believe that happy wives make for happy husbands and we try to pro-



Photos by Paul Schumann

Dero G. Downing, new president of Western Kentucky University, relaxes with his son, Alex, 4,

in a game of pool. The family will move to the president's house on the campus in January.

vide a warm, friendly atmosphere for the new wives," she explained.

Ann, the pretty daughter who lives in a dorm on campus, said "it's fun" to have a daddy who's president of the school.

"I really like it," she said. "But sometimes it scares away the boys."

"That's what my older daughter (Kathryn) used to say when I was principal of the training school," said Downing with a laugh.

The Downings' present home, with five bedrooms, is furnished with a number of early American pieces, including many chairs.

"Dero is chair crazy," Harriet Downing said. "Anytime he goes anywhere and sees a chair that can be fixed up he usually brings it home."

An abstract painting by Downing's brother, Joe, an internationally-known artist living in Paris, hangs on one wall

of the living room while some needlepoint works by Harriet Downing, in antique frames, are on another wall above the couch.

The responsibilities of being the 11,000-student university's first family are still hard to realize. It's like Kathryn's reaction upon hearing of her father's selection to the president.

"Oh, Mother, I'm thrilled to death, at least I think I am."



Mrs. Downing, shown with Alex, says she has mixed emotions about leaving her home of 10 years in the Bowling Green suburbs.

