

IX

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When his wife's failing health forced Golding to resign, in 1982, the Trustees chose a more personable man to succeed him. The school's ninth president, Michael Schwartz (1982-91) had come to Kent in 1974, survived a brutal, five-month illness in a San Francisco hospital, returned to his job, and then mounted to the school's second highest office, vice president for Academic and Student Affairs. A man of wide drawn university, Schwartz was swift of mind and of wit. His manner was affable, approachable, accessible. Though wearing few of the usual airs of command, he relished being in charge, and, for all his candor and cordiality, he had an assertive, volatile nature and was equally quick to give sympathy or take offense. In keeping, he had keen political antennae, enjoyed intellectual give and take, and was fascinated by nearly every aspect of academic life. All this, together with his insider's knowledge of Kent—its structure, its power relationships, its personalities, its culture—impelled him to concentrate his energies on internal development. His first fall as president was highlighted by "Dazzle," the glamorous opening of the Kent State University Museum in lavishly renovated Rockwell Hall. Haute couture came to Kent. Famous designers, celebrities, and museum benefactors attended a black-tie cocktail party in the Museum, then adjourned to the Student Center for a dinner-dance that culminated in a laser light show that boomed, glowed, and booming—inscribed the affair on the skies over Kent.

One of Schwartz's first proposals—to require all undergraduates to take a core liberal arts curriculum—was arguably his most significant and valiant. The aim was to stem the inordinate influence of professional accrediting bodies on curricula and degree requirements, as well as to reverse the trend toward vocationalism and specialization that was changing the historic concept of the university as a place where a student could acquire a common, unifying body of knowledge. Although the Liberal Education Requirements (LER) program (1982) that survived the sometimes self-serving massagings of various curricular committees may not have been all he had hoped for, it ensured that for a time Kent students would breathe the fresh air of the Western intellectual tradition.

Twice during the decade Schwartz, seeking a creative equilibrium for the school's mission statement revised, first accenting undergraduate education and later research and graduate programs, to cut back attrition rates and improve quality, had persuaded the Faculty Senate to set admission standards keyed to high school GPAs. Several doctoral programs were added, along with two major institutes—in Applied Linguistics and Translation Studies and in International Programs, the latter effectively internationalizing the University. The whole campus became handicapped accessible and welcoming. And it began the process of becoming wired to the electronic age: e-mail communications were computerized; computer terminals glowed to ever the glow of an office. Some major academic buildings were sound-immersed: the new Mathematical Sciences Building and the Child Development Center. The Field House was built beside Dix Stadium, and the University Center was given new form and function as the Michael Schwartz Center housing student services. The much needed renovation of Front Campus began, appropriately, with McGilvrey Hall. Kent followed the national managerial trend in higher education, cutting faculty positions and jobs through five-year, early-retirement "buy-outs." The second, which ended in 1996, took 235 faculty—most of White's "Young Turks."



*Elegance at the
Kent State University Museum*

*The May 4 Memorial
at daffodil time.*



*Michael Schwartz, Kent's ninth
president (1982-91)*

Although state support continued to drop, enrollments—and student fees—rose steadily. So did faculty salaries. Merit incentives—first in research, then in teaching and service—were written into several collective bargaining contracts. Every few years the administration was forced to mud-rattle over a contract with the faculty union.

In sports, the baseball, basketball, gymnastics, and wrestling teams had notable seasons. Coach Herb Page's golf teams dominated the MAC and, during the eighties and nineties, ranked among the best in the country. In the '90s, the women's varsity teams were uniformly outstanding: the basketball team won the MAC title in 1998. But the football teams were hapless.

Student styles were less bizarre than in the psychedelic, polyester seventies: Long, straight hair, parted in the middle, gave way to hair cut shorter and styled. Hip-hugging bell-bottom blue jeans gave way to sweats and chinos; love beads, mood rings, and macrame belts to power ties; platform shoes and sandals to docksiders. (The favorite apparel of the Nineties for both men and women was baseball caps and blue jeans.) Ingeniously constructed lofts and theme parties—Beach Party, Toga Party, Hairy Buffalo Party—were residence hall fads. Halloween became a major festival, attracting thousands of cleverly costumed students and spectators to downtown Kent. Schwartz's—and the University's—most satisfying moment came May 4, 1990, a year before he resigned. On a chill rainy day more than 4,000 people huddled under umbrellas beside Taylor Hall for the dedication of the memorial to the four students killed twenty years earlier on a hot sunny day. The bitter-sweet, cathartic moment of resolution came when Ohio Governor Richard Celeste formally apologized on behalf of the state for the tragedy.