

Jeffrey Kleiman

This week we are happy to name Jeffrey Kleiman as the 142nd inductee in Marshfield's 150: Heroes and Leaders, Past and Present register. Jeff Kleiman was nominated by Don Schnitzler.

History professor Jeffrey Kleiman has lived in Marshfield for more than 35 years, teaching at the UW-Marshfield/Wood County Center, later UW-Stevens Point at Marshfield. During those years, he encouraged students to develop critical thinking skills, presented exceptional programs for life learners, and inspired students and community members alike to set and achieve their goals.



Accepting Marshfield's assistant professor of history position in 1988, Kleiman held a bachelor's degree from Lindenwood College, St. Charles, Massachusetts, master's from the University of Cincinnati, Ohio, and a doctoral from Michigan State University.

His early teaching assignments included typical lower-division undergraduate courses like, American History, Western Civilization and World History. His lectures focused on the complex and compelling stories of real history, and he asked his students to apply critical and analytical thinking skills--beginning the difficult task of interpreting events rather than merely repeating what they had read about them. While teaching at UW-Stevens Point, the opportunity for upper-level courses allowed Kleiman to teach in his research field of the Holocaust. His work here culminated in translating a survivor's memoir from Yiddish to English.

Kleiman developed a reputation as being a "notoriously tough grader." He remained an instructor with no compulsion to give anything but an honest grade. Yet, his classes were always filled.

In 1991, to help high school students prepare to enter college, Kleiman introduced a course, "Summer Study Skills: The Key to Academic Success." It aimed at helping students develop the ability to read books and write papers, to take notes, to take tests, set priorities, meet deadlines and to adapt to the new environment of college life.

That same year, the student body, along with the student government Senate awarded him the first of his teaching excellence awards at the Marshfield campus.

Kleiman and then Dean Nancy Auman, offered a special continuing education series entitled, "1964-1989: A Quarter Century of Usage" celebrating the 25th anniversary of University of Wisconsin, Marshfield-Wood County. Over six weeks, they discussed 25 years of changes in education, civil rights, political campaigns, lifestyle trends from hippies to

yuppies, impacts of Vietnam, Watergate, Reaganomics and global challenges of the Common Market and the Third World since the campus opened.

Kleiman frequently presented continuing education courses offered on the Marshfield campus and was also often invited to speak for local organizations and at special events. His discussions provided exceptional programs for everyone on a lifelong learning journey. With topics ranging from local to global history, Kleiman delivered talks on America's religious, political and ethnic history, the Holocaust and Holocaust denial.

In 1994, Kleiman was appointed as a Wisconsin teaching fellow--one of only two faculty selected that year from the UW Centers. Wisconsin teaching fellows are selected from UW System faculty in their first ten years of college teaching who display strong potential to become outstanding teachers at the undergraduate level.

Then in 2002, Kleiman was named a U.S. Fulbright scholar and spent the 2002-2003 school year at the University of Lodz in Lodz, Poland. While there he taught a historical survey of America since 1939, the history of American business and the history of minority groups in America. During that time, he helped six Polish students complete their master's degrees, one of whom had her thesis published by Lodz University Press. He also conducted research on the Holocaust and post-World War II Europe for an intended book project.

Two years after returning to Marshfield, Kleiman, was awarded a second Fulbright Scholarship, taking him back to Poland as a senior specialist with the Fulbright Program for lecturing, teaching and conducting seminars in Krakow, Warsaw and Lodz on ethnic and religious politics in the United States. He arrived in Poland to attend an international Holocaust Studies conference in Krakow, where he was invited to deliver an academic paper.

As Marshfield prepared to celebrate its 125th anniversary in 1997, Kleiman joined the Marshfield History Project, a local group interested in creating a unique and comprehensive history of Marshfield. His knowledge of history, research and writing skills provided needed guidance to help bring that history, "The Marshfield Story. Piecing Together Our Past," to completion. As the major contributor he detailed the city's history from its origins as little more than a clearing alongside the railroad tracks to its status as a modern Wisconsin community. Sifting through thousands of newspaper clippings and integrating the information with state and national trends he wrote the first five chapters of the book. With submitted stories on businesses, organizations, schools, churches, families, and special sections on Marshfield military, blacksmiths, and railroads, the book was really the first comprehensive history of the city.

In 1999, the State Historical Society of Wisconsin recognized Kleiman's efforts creating the history book with a local history award of merit. Presenting the award, State Historical Society Director, George L Vogt, said the Marshfield History Book showed that people make history together, and that people working together, "can do history." A belief underlying the project remains the role that academic historians should play in helping people make sense of how important local history can be.

An example of this came about when Kleiman served as a board member of the private, non-denominational, Henry A. Praschak Memorial Fund, which raised funds to buy the statue of Jesus Christ in Praschak Wayside and the land surrounding it from the city of Marshfield. The challenge came to preserve the only statue in Marshfield's history against those who sought its complete removal.

In response to a pro-Nazi exhibit in the public library during early 2003, Kleiman, and others, founded the Marshfield Social Justice Group. This group worked to help create a welcoming environment for all people living in the Marshfield area and began the Marshfield Area Cultural Fair in the spring of 2004. This activity promoted respect and acceptance of diversity within the community and to promote community harmony. From the outset, Kleiman has actively helped develop plans and participated in most Fairs, which celebrated its 20th anniversary in 2024.

University students and community members alike have benefited from Kleiman's passion for teaching and life-long learning. The Marshfield Story and annual Marshfield Cultural Fair are significant parts of his community legacy. But the greater legacy is seeing what the students accomplished as he encouraged them to think outside of the box: to think differently, creatively and inventively throughout their lives.