



More than a Librarian

“I decided I would like to work with knowledge and ideas...That was what I really wanted to do....”

From the Middle East to Kentucky, Phil Hanna brings worldview to Columbia

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As Phil Hanna, the director of library services at Lindsey Wilson College (LWC), sits in front of his computer in the Katie Murrell Library working on his financial spreadsheets, a photo hangs over his desk. If he looks up and to the right, he can take a good look at it.

Although he took the photo himself, it is not of anyone he knows. Hanna is simply a man who enjoys taking the occasional photo, and the two people in this one caught his eye while he was on a trip to San Francisco about 10 years ago.

“We were in a food court, and this woman was feeding her child noodles with chopsticks,” Hanna said. “And I sort of held my camera up, and she said, ‘Okay,’ and I took the picture. And it’s a wonderful little picture because they’re absorbed in each other. And if I were to call it something, I’d call it ‘Noodles.’”

As a child growing up in the country of Lebanon, Hanna liked to take a lot of pictures, which he took with slides. He can now look at these pictures and remember

the good memories he made in that country.

Lebanon has always been a major part of Hanna’s life, although he was born in Louisville, Ky., at the Highlands Baptist Hospital in 1951.

Hanna’s parents, Edwin and Arpiné, were missionaries in Lebanon. They only came back to the United States so Edwin could attend seminary and become a “full-fledged Presbyterian missionary.” They stayed just long enough for that.

In Lebanon, the family, which later included two brothers, lived in a rural development project, where electricity was limited.

“We had, I think, generator power for a couple hours every evening,” Hanna said. “And they taught the young men agriculture and building. They had a bakery. And they taught the women home economics. And it was basically to teach modern skills in a very traditional culture.”

Hanna grew up speaking English, but when he was three years old he started learning some Arabic. He studied the language mainly by playing with other children. He continued this study up until his college years, and he can still speak and read some Arabic words.

In 1969, when he was almost 18 years old, he went to get a Bachelor’s Degree in Psychology at Transylvania University in Lexington, Ky.

Although Hanna has not lived in Lebanon since then and he has not been able to visit for 40 years, he stays connected with his old home in other ways, including by

volunteering with the Presbyterian Mission Agency’s Syria Lebanon Partnership Network.

“Part of my heart is still in Lebanon,” Hanna said. “I haven’t been back since 1975, but through Facebook, which is an amazing resource, I’ve made contact with many of my childhood friends.”

After studying at Transylvania for four years, Hanna went to further his education in Louisville in 1974. Hanna started getting a Master’s of Divinity (MDiv) at Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary, but dropped out of that after just three semesters.

“I didn’t think I wanted to be a pastor...” Hanna said.

He instead started going to the University of Louisville to get a Master’s in Social Work (MSW). In 1976, he also started working at the Southern Indiana Mental Health and Guidance Center in nearby Jeffersonville, Ind.

Despite the change in plans, Hanna still thought about seminary.

“I liked the study of religion at the graduate level,” Hanna said. “I liked the faculty and how it was taught. And so even when I stopped I sort of felt like I would like to go back and finish it, but I needed a context.”

That context was a dual track program. The seminary gave him one year’s credit towards the MDiv for completing the MSW, so Hanna only had to take two years of seminary. After graduation from both programs, Hanna continued working as a mental health technician at the center.

“It was a good place to work with many rewarding and satisfying experiences, and I valued my time there and the people I worked with,” Hanna said.

In 1991, however, Hanna decided it was time for a “midlife job change.” He moved back to Lexington and went to the University of Kentucky to get his third professional Master’s degree, this one in Library Science.

“I decided I would like to work with

knowledge and ideas,” Hanna said. “That was what I really wanted to do.”

Hanna even worked at the local public library while getting his degree.

As he was finishing his degree in 1993, Hanna began job searching. Individuals at LWC saw his credentials and became interested.

In August, Edward Seufert, who has since retired, called Hanna in for an interview.

“This was when the college was just beginning to start its Master’s in counseling,” Hanna said. “And because I had a background in mental health, that was why he decided I would be the person.”

After being shown around the campus, Hanna was offered the job the same day. He took a couple days to think about it, and then he accepted the job.

Ever since then, Hanna has been working with money, students, and knowledge at LWC. One of the programs he heads up is the Arts and Lecture Series, which hosts various speakers and artists on campus.

“I like to expose students to ideas through speakers,” Hanna said. “I like to expose them to genres of music they wouldn’t hear, like Celtic music.”

But working in the library and managing the series has not been the only thing taking up Hanna’s time. He has also been fighting prostate cancer, which is one of the reasons he has not made it back to Lebanon yet.

Hanna had to have radiation therapy in Glasgow, Ky., but it did not cause “any particularly strong side effects or inconveniences” for him.

Still, Hanna is hopeful. His prostate-specific antigen level has been dropping significantly lately, which is a good thing.

Hanna hopes his health will continue to improve, and as it does, he looks forward to taking a trip back to Lebanon sometime in the future.



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office in the Roundhouse, office number 303.

Stevenson said that the response from students involved in the international program has been very good.

“We have had a lot of positive and excited responses from the international students!” Stevenson said. “They are all excited to help and give back to the community and town that has given them an opportunity to have a great experience while studying here at LWC. Most international students have heard of food drives before, as charity and donations are important all over the world and giving back is an essential part of the holidays in a lot of cultures.”

Stevenson believes that events such as this are important for students to get involved in -- especially during the holiday season.

“[I]t helps remind us of the true meaning behind the holidays, that is love and compassion,” Stevenson said. “Opportunities like this give us a chance to help those that are in need all around us without really even impacting our lives or holiday time. Events such as this give people an opportunity to show love and support to community members around them that maybe do not have as much in life. The holiday season should be a time of joy and happiness for everyone. This event is helping that come

to pass right here in Columbia, Kentucky.”

For LWC student, Laura Feese, involvement in giving this year has taken the form of heading up the fourth annual Coats for Kids, as a part of the Bonner Scholars.

Coats for Kids is a coat drive that was started by LWC alumna, Brooke Harmon. The goal this year is to collect 60 coats -- which should be enough to provide a coat for every child in Head Start in Columbia.

“In years past, we have raised each year close to \$1500,” Co-director of the Bonner Scholar Program, Amy Thompson-Wells said. “That is in donations and in coats...that equals out to be about that. So we have met our need every year. So hopefully we will meet our need this year. We will be delivering coats to the kiddos on December 17th at the Head Start here.”

Feese believes that giving, especially during the holiday season, is very important.

“I know that it’s a really inconvenient time to be doing things, because schoolwork is a lot harder and there’s a lot more to do,” Feese said. “But, also being around the holidays, I think that it’s more important to help -- especially now.”

She especially believes that things like Coats for Kids are great to donate to because they support the local community.

“It stays local, so you feel good about giving when you know that it’s going to stay within your community,” Feese said. “A lot of the kids are lower income, so they need it.”

Along with Coats for Kids, the Bonner Scholars have many other giving initiatives going on this holiday season.

One of these is providing blankets for shut-in seniors in the community. “It would be 50 blankets for the elderly in the community who are shut in,” Thompson-Wells said. “So we’ll have a blanket that says Lindsey Wilson College Bonners, so that will be put in their baskets. And their baskets may consist of food items, hygiene products, anything like that...anything personal.”

Also, the Bonner program along with the Student Athletic Council are working together to do bell-ringing for the Salvation Army. This will be held on December 4 at Walmart and other stores across Columbia.

A large event that they are co-hosting with Medal of Honor Recipient, Dakota Meyer, is the Community Christmas Dinner. The dinner, provided by Jeff Willis and the Dining Center staff will be held on December 16.

“[W]e are providing a Thanksgiving type meal to families in need from Green and Adair counties,” Thompson-Wells said. “We get Toys for Tots involved, so Toys for Tots will supply us with toys for over 150 children in the area, so that evening they will get a wonderful meal, and then each kid will get a backpack full of toys.”

Invitations go to the Family Resource Center, who then locates families who are in need, and connects them to the Bonner program, so they can come to the dinner. The dinner targets Green and Adair County

families, because those are the two counties that Meyer is from. Thompson-Wells said that Meyer wants to give back to the communities who have done so much for him over the years.

Thompson-Wells said that, in spite of the stress and hard work, it is all still very rewarding.

“It’s time consuming, and it’s a lot of planning, and you’re like ‘oh my gosh, are we gonna get through this?’” Thompson-Wells said. “But, when you’re in the act of serving and you see everyone’s faces and their reaction when they’re at the dinner, it makes it all worth it.”

Thompson-Wells, along with many others, believes that giving is especially important during the holiday season.

“It seems that the need is magnified during the holidays, so that’s why I always encourage our Bonners to really reach out during this time, especially because this is when it seems like they need us the most,” she said. “We have the resources here; we have a large community of servant leaders, so let’s try to make the biggest impact possible during this time, to make them feel loved and let them feel blessed during the holiday season. By doing the Community Christmas Dinner, the Coats for Kids, we’re giving them things that they may not have otherwise. But, I just think that it’s important for people to feel loved, especially during the holidays...and that they matter.”