

Humanities Chair Sees Capital College as Unique

By Michele Hart

Owning a cat named Khadafi seems to be typical for the multi-faceted Dr. William Mahar, chairman of the Humanities division at Capital College. Mahar told a journalism class Nov. 23 that his pet "was born a terrorist."

The son of Irish immigrants who settled in Syracuse, New York, this plumber-turned-educator has been head of the division for three years. He was given the position, he said, because it was his turn in the rotation. "As a group, we [the Humanities division] believe that each one of us should have a turn at it because each of us are scholars," he said.

Mahar's upbringing did not indicate that he would become a scholar. His family's biggest dream, he said, was that someday he would own his own plumbing truck.

He became bored with plumbing and entered Saint Bernard's Seminary as an education major. From there he went to Syracuse University, changed his major, and graduated with a

Master's degree in music. He changed his major one more time while at Syracuse and got his Doctorate in Humanities.

It was during his years as a student that Mahar became a self-described student activist. He took an interest in civil rights and the right to vote for blacks. He was never arrested for his activist activities. "I was a



Dr. William Mahar

middle-of-the-roader in an activist society," he said.

As his career as a student came to a close, his teaching career began. His first teaching position was at Syracuse. He stayed there for three years and then moved on to Herbert Leaman College in the Bronx. After three years there Mahar came to Penn State Harrisburg in 1971 to teach music. He was drawn to this campus because of the unique interdisciplinary humanities program, he said.

"Capital College was unique in the 60s and 70s and still is in the Penn State system," he explained.

Mahar has seen changes in the student body since his arrival here. "I've always thought we had excellent students," he said, but students have shifted their emphasis from education

and participation to vocation. He said that in the 1970s students were very active and "organizations thrived." Now, however, he finds that student organizations struggle to continue.

But even if the students change

Mahar said that he enjoys his job and will continue as division head until the goals of the division are met. He likes what he does because it enables him to learn about many different areas in the humanities, which he said suits him well.

"I have a very short attention span I've been told," he said.

Outside of Capital College Mahar has a special interest in 19th century music, a subject that he is writing a book about. He said he will dedicate the book to his wife of 23 years, Connie and their two children Andy and Jenny, "for putting up with me."

He also enjoys contemporary music, an interest that began in the 1950s when he was a vocalist and piano player in a rock and roll band. His favorite artists from the 1960s include The Beatles, The Who, Led Zeplin, and Bob Dylan "now that I'm older," he said.

That is not very surprising to hear from the good-natured Mahar, whose record collection is probably as diverse as his interests and talents.

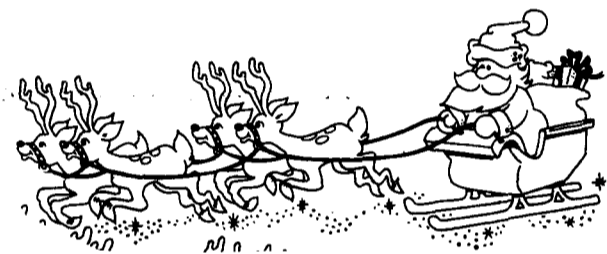
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