MEMORIAL RESOLUTION
JAMES N. ROSSE
(1931-2004)

James N. Rosse, the eighth Provost of Stanford University, died on February 16, 2004 in Newport Beach, California of a pulmonary condition. Jim had a long and distinguished career at Stanford. He excelled as a teacher, mentor, researcher, colleague, and academic administrator.

Jim Rosse was born on November 4th, 1931 in Sidney, Nebraska. After graduating from North High School in Omaha, Nebraska, Jim studied for two years at Princeton. He withdrew from college, married Janice Grimminger and started a family. They had four children in the 1950s. Jim worked for eight years in the mailrooms of the Omaha World Herald and the Minneapolis Star and Tribune. While working full time and supporting his family, Jim completed has undergraduate education at the University of Minnesota. His interest in the newspaper and communications industry would continue for the rest of his life. In the fall of 1961 Jim became a full time graduate student and earned his PhD in economics in 1965 at the University of Minnesota.

Jim Rosse came to Stanford in the fall of 1965. Even as an Assistant Professor, he developed some of the best graduate students in the department. They thrived under his direction, writing superb dissertations and often going on to brilliant careers. Through his students, the “Rosse school of thought” changed the nature of the field of industrial organization in economics. Jim Rosse was also an excellent undergraduate teacher. He taught in both the Economics Department and in the Public Policy program. In 1976 he was one of the first recipients of the Dean’s Award for Teaching in the School of Humanities and Sciences.

Jim Rosse was an outstanding academic administrator. Between 1971 and 1975 he served first as Vice Chairman and then as Chairman of the Department of Economics. Working with Moe Abramovitz, Jim turned a demoralized and deteriorating department into a powerhouse. Within three years, he hired faculty who won on to win two Nobel Prizes and three John Bates Clark Awards. More than that, he created an environment in which both graduate students and junior faculty could reach their full potential.

Jim Rosse’s ability as an administrator did not go unnoticed in the university as a whole. He served as Associate Dean of the School of Humanities and Sciences between 1978 and 1982. He then took the idea of the Center for Economic Policy Research and turned it into a reality, serving as its Steering Committee’s first chairman and then as Director from 1982 to 1984.

In 1984, Jim Rosse was appointed Provost. Over the next eight years, Stanford faced a series of challenges, not all of which could be convincingly represented as opportunities. There were continuing difficulties with the government over security and academic freedom, the Loma Prieta Earthquake, and the controversy over Western Culture. Jim was an influential and moderating presence throughout, and Stanford owes much for the sharp economist’s eye he applied to the leadership of the Budget Group. During a series of economic ups and downs, Stanford managed an exemplary kind of controlled growth.
During his tenure, the record breaking Centennial Campaign was launched and completed, Stanford in Washington was established and Science and Engineering Quad was begun.

Jim Rosse’s focus was on the Stanford faculty: its welfare and its quality. He was a low key but persuasive recruiter, and his national network of respected colleagues helped – for example, in his persuasion of Michael Spence to return to Stanford as Dean of the Graduate School of Business. He worried about Stanford’s role as landlord for many of its valued faculty members and it was his decision that established the first homeowners’ association to represent campus residents. His voice in community relations regularly extended the president’s.

Jim has been described as a man careful enough to wear both belt and suspenders. Sometimes his prescience kept the university he cared for out of encroaching trouble. As the downturn of the very early 90’s approached he led a budget reduction exercise before its time – an initiative noted on the first page of the New York Times, above the fold. During the difficulties with the government over indirect costs, that history proved to be important, and in his last year as Provost, Jim led the institution through a very difficult budget-cutting exercise. His commitment to Stanford and to its future was unmistakable, and his efforts in this last year were the more remarkable because he made them despite the knowledge that he was soon to leave Stanford.

When he stepped down, the subtitle of the Campus Report story was “the right man at the right time.” After completing his term as Provost, Jim Rosse left Stanford and became the President and Chief Executive Officer of the media company, Freedom Communications, Inc. in Irvine, California. The company owns radio and television stations as well as a string of newspapers across the country led by the Orange County Register. Jim was back in the newspaper business, albeit at a significantly higher level than when he left in 1961. He retired in 1999 from Freedom Communications after a very successful seven years at the helm. Jim Rosse stayed close to Stanford, even after leaving.

He served on the Humanities and Sciences Council and on the SIEPR Advisory Board. His priorities were revealed when an anonymous donor wanted to honor Jim’s service to the university by naming the lounge in the then new Landau Economics building after him. When Jim was told that the new lounge would be called the Jim Rosse Faculty-Student Lounge he was flattered, but said that there was something terribly wrong. The name didn’t accord with his priorities. It should be the Jim Rosse Student-Faculty lounge and so it is.

Jim Rosse was a wonderful friend of Stanford University. He is survived by Jan, his wife of almost 52 years, their sons, Jay of Omaha, Nebraska and Stuart of Charlotte, North Carolina, and their daughter Anne of Irvine, California. Their other daughter, Susan, died in 1983 and is remembered with the Susan Rosse Library at Stanford in Washington. He is also survived by both of his parents, James C. and Shirley Rosse of Omaha.

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