

Warren C. Willig, First Member of CSUN's School of Science and
Mathematics Faculty,
Dies at 99

Long term faculty member Warren Willig has died after teaching from 1956 to 1988 including serving as the first Department Chair in Mathematics and taking up Emeritus status for 34 years.

Born 3 July, 1923 in Pensacola, Florida to Frederick and Frances (nee Christie) Willig. Fred ("The Chief") was a non-commissioned officer in early-Naval Aviation, while Frances was the daughter of a prominent ship-builder in the Gulf of Mexico Coast port. The young family moved to New York to experience the prosperity of the 1920's and then the Great Depression. Warren attended a mix of Catholic and public school but most important to him was graduating with Bronx Science High School's first class. This institution was the prototype for STEM magnet schools in the US. He was a star athlete playing both basketball and football, although he always said neither were much of a team, the other players were too smart.

Joining the US Navy in response to the attack at Pearl Harbor, Warren served as an enlisted aircraft mechanic and navigator aboard PBY flying boats over the North Atlantic. Later he became a plane captain in charge of maintenance for one of Ferry Squadrons Six's aircraft. In 1943, through excellent test results, he was sent as an ensign to Yale ultimately graduating with a BA in Mathematics during 1947. With the degree in hand, he hitchhiked across the country working manual jobs in the post-war economy. First in a hide tanning plant in Salt Lake City, then manhandling a jack hammer to disassemble railroad cars in LA, and most fondly, constructing workers accommodations in Alaska, he developed a keen appreciation of the real work that keeps the country running. Returning from this adventure and after attending Columbia for his Masters, he took various faculty positions until in 1950 he arrived at Mitchell College in Statesville, N.C.

While teaching at Mitchell he met another accomplished student, Anne Pipkin. They were married soon after and three children ensued. Faculty appointments at the College of Charleston, Blair College, and Middle Georgia College moved the family about on the East Coast. This period

included a very-short stint as a mathematician for Eglin Air Force Base evaluating weapons. Finally a position prospect in Southern California appeared, which he remembered from the late-forties and liked the weather.

California had seen the rapid growth of suburbs and the San Fernando Valley Campus of Los Angeles State College was created in 1956 to address the need for peripheral campuses of the State College system. Warren was among the first faculty members hired (certainly the first in mathematics) and since it was so small, taught physics as well. Cycling from Canoga Park he was one of the few residents to reject the car as his basic means of transportation. To help feed and house his growing family (two more children had arrived), he worked part-time just down Owensmouth Ave. from home, at the Canoga Park Rocketdyne plant helping design and evaluate fuel systems for the Convair Atlas intercontinental ballistic missile.

The adjunct campus soon became San Fernando Valley State College and Warren served as Department Chair at the beginning of this high growth period. Hiring some from California university doctoral programs, but including many others from around the world. The latter fact pleased him and gave the Department a cosmopolitan start in the modern interconnected world.

Harkening back to his earlier experiences in the world of mechanics and construction, he helped many of his colleagues repair appliances and cars, or modify their homes. He designed the Departmental entry exam to help slot students into the proper class regardless of their prior high school classwork and what grade they might have earned. For students he was always in the office and ready to help with their mathematical challenges.

Of course Valley State became California State College, Northridge and the department expanded, but ever the one to optimize outcomes, Warren decided to retire in 1982 tacking on a part time service extension until 1988.

By 1970 Warren was restless again. Purchasing 2.5 acres of raw land in Lobo Canyon, Agoura, he designed and constructed his own modest home. This then became his hobby, following with a garage, a second

“retirement” home for retired life with Anne, and a workshop. The land was essentially treeless save for a few native sycamores at first, but trees and shrubs with landscaping walls and other features enhanced the property. He made it a place, “I never want to leave,” as he often said.

His beloved Anne died in 2020 from bladder cancer. He is survived by children Warren Jr. (“Chris”), Katherine (“Kate”), Evan, and Kurt; son Mark had died in 2016. But he was proudest of the grandchildren numbering 13 and 11 great-grandchildren.

Chris Willig - 7 September, 2022



Warren C Willig in 1979 as a house builder.



Warren C Willig in 2022 wearing his favorite flight jacket.