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Interview with David Rotman

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Dr. Dave Rotman: I came to Cedarville in the fall of 1984 as a professor of information systems. I taught full time for two years then became Director of Computer Services which later became Chief Information Officer and had that role until I retired in 2017. My wife and I lived in Elkhart, Indiana, attended First Baptist Church there, and during a couple week period, two different people in the church came up to me and said "hey, Cedarville has an opening in information systems, you ought to think about that." So we talked about it, came down for an interview. Leaving the interview, we said to each other "no way. We're not going to be there." Dr. Ron Walker, who was in the business department at that time, called us and was quite persuasive. Brought us back, we came and looked again, and moved here.

Dr. Dave Rotman: Partly, but we were very comfortable where we were.

Speaker 2: Oh, I see, yeah.

Dr. Dave Rotman: We liked our church, I was Director of Computer Services at Indiana University at South Bend. So I enjoyed that and wasn't sure about going back to full-time teaching. I'd been a math teacher previously. Partly the town. We knew it was small. We kind of expected homes that would have acreage, lots of space. Quite disappointed to see homes in town with very tiny lots. Just weren't sure how the fit would be. It's kind of remote, still is. We lived about two miles from the malls, shopping and stuff.

Speaker 2: So and then here-

Dr. Dave Rotman: It's 10 miles to McDonald's.

Speaker 2: Right.

Dr. Dave Rotman: Talking to us, pray about this, consider it. I certainly liked the Christian mission. The focus of the university very strong on biblical integration, on chapel, Bible minor. A chance to influence student lives was why we came. It's more about managing information systems and leading the people who write the software.

Speaker 2: I see.

Dr. Dave Rotman: Not quite as heavy in actual writing of software.

Dr. Dave Rotman: Got to know several students and kept up with some of them, still a few. Being here so long I was pleased to meet a couple of them as parents of students coming here. But I had one who worked in Wisconsin in a hospital system. He

	was a very good student, and you could tell he had potential. Came back later, I think we talked about algorithm design and how we'd covered that in class and how important that was for him.
Dr. Dave Rotman:	I developed a lot of relationships in the Dayton IT community. I was on the board of a group called Technology First. IT leaders from around the Dayton area. Some major corporations here. A lot of students don't realize that but it's a pretty major area, and a large military influence with Wright-Patterson Air Force Base. So that was a good experience.
Dr. Dave Rotman:	I also got involved in church, Grace Baptist Church here. And one of the blessings of the small community is I had young kids, my wife and I did first, second and third grade for a bunch of years. And then for about 15 years I did four year olds. I knew the kids, but I also knew most of their parents. Either they worked here on campus, or in a lot of cases their parents had gone to school with my children, so had a connection with them. It's great to see them in Sunday school, because then I would see them around town or at the library or whatever and just make a connection. For a little kid, oh, Mr. Rotman, you're here. They just can't believe that you actually live outside the church.
Dr. Dave Rotman:	A humorous one, I forget which boy this was, but he and his parents were driving through town and happened to pass a hearse. Well they explained to him what that was, and he said "that's not Mr. Rotman in there, is it?"
Speaker 2:	He was worried you were in the hearse.
Dr. Dave Rotman:	Especially with some of the deans, Steve Winteregg who was dean of fine arts, Pam Johnson who's still here. Stan Baczek who is gone. Dan Wetzel who retired years ago. But just lots of good friends. I've always enjoyed the intellectual interaction and stimulation. Ate at Chuck's a lot and just talked with people. Patrick Oliver would be another one. It's always good to interact with people from different disciplines and round out your own experience. One challenge I had leaving high school and college was to understand that not everybody thinks like I do. Not everybody's had the same background. So don't prejudge, oh, I know why they did that. No, you know what they did, but you don't know why they did it. One of the biggest was in the early 1990s, we had a task team that studied technology. Where's it headed, what should Cedarville be doing. We recommended starting CedarNet, a campus network. That was the early 90s, so very few schools were doing that. And Dr. Dixon got on board with that. Duane Wood, who was academic vice president, got on board. Actually became sales people. Students got upset at the time because we were increasing fees to cover this. And they actually had a protest saying "we don't need computers." Which sounds crazy now, but they actually painted the rock saying "down with computers." And they floated a boat on Cedar Lake saying, "we don't need those computers."
Speaker 2:	You really had an uprising on your hands.

Dr. Dave Rotman:	Yes. For Cedarville it was pretty dramatic. But Dr. Dixon then took a chapel service and talked about "your enjoying the benefits of what your predecessors did here. It's your turn. You're going to help Cedarville move ahead. You're stomaching these fees and getting on board." Of course, within a couple of years, there was no doubt. It was a great move. Windows 3.1 just came out, so that was the basis of our operating system. We connected to the Internet in January of 93. So the first semester, there was no Internet, but just you could talk to each other. And something that we take for granted now, you could email a professor. Before 92, you couldn't do that.
Speaker 2:	Wow. Yeah.
Dr. Dave Rotman:	And it just helped communication, it helped access to library resources. The university joined OhioLINK. OhioLINK came online that same time period. So you could search OhioLINK cataloger, get books sent here. So it was a great service for students. For a while, we accessed gopher sites. You probably have never used a gopher site. It was a very basic, primitive way to search for things. And you often had to do it by inference. Like maybe you'd look up a card catalog title, and know that oh, this person must be an expert in that area because he wrote a book. We also started writing transactions that students could run from the dorm. Like send me a copy of my transcript. And again, that was brand new. People couldn't do that before. Our software vendor didn't provide that service. And some of those are still being used.
Speaker 2:	Really?
Dr. Dave Rotman:	We modernized them for web interface. But things like clocking in for work, that again was new. Registering for classes, took a shortcut, we said vendor doesn't provide online registration yet. So we wrote a program that captured the registration and made it look to the system like it was a scan sheet. We were very pleased with how well it went, how well the students supported it. Faculty got on board. They started submitting grades electronically, which was a new thing.
Speaker 2:	Yes indeed. I mean Blackboard came out in 99, right?
Dr. Dave Rotman:	Yeah.
Speaker 2:	So you're way ahead.
Dr. Dave Rotman:	And we were pleased to be recognized by a group which is now called EduCause. It was Cause at the time. It was an honorable mention in 1993 as best network in the country. When they called I was disappointed. Honorable mention, second place isn't fun. But we were honorable mention along with Brown University, some other Ivy League schools. So not bad.
Speaker 2:	Not bad, not bad at all.

Dr. Dave Rotman: And then 97 we won the award for the best campus network for colleges with a budget under $100 million. The engineering program began 91, 92. The ENS was added onto in 92. That really helped Cedarville move. That was possible because we had always had a strong background in the sciences. Nursing had started a couple years before that. And then under Dr. Brown's leadership, we started pharmacy. And it's been a phenomenal program. And now just in the last year, civil engineering started. So the leadership has made the right moves to keep Cedarville on the leading edge.

Dr. Dave Rotman: Chapel I think has had a strong influence on me. I tried to go every day for those 30 years. Interacting with the staff in technology, right now there are 20 people in that department. Great folks. Early on, we had just some programmers who wrote the software and they love the Lord and we served together. It became a team. I started early on and I don't mean this in a bragging sense, this just kind of happened. When we first bought our software called Colleague, there were three of us in that technology department. When the other two folks had birthdays, I brought in some cookies or cake or whatever. And I kept doing that as the department grew. And at one point I had 25 people reporting to me. So 25 times a year I'd bake cookies or cake or something. I did the baking myself. It was just fun to help celebrate and encourage them.

Dr. Dave Rotman: We had a blind employee at the campus radio station and one day he called me up with a question. I told him well there should be this object in the upper left hand corner of your screen. He said, "oh yeah, I see that." Well Brian, that's generous of you. And then you may know the name Dick Walker who was in student life for a lot of years. When we put in the CedarNet he stopped me one day and said 'hey, I covered the jack on the wall with duct tape so I won't get a virus."

Dr. Dave Rotman: It's been a privilege. I always would tell new faculty like you, give it a couple years. It took us really two years to get situated and adjusted, get to know people and how things run. Now we just love the place and we would come back if we could.