

Karen Frair



"I just cannot imagine myself away from a university. It's me; it's where I want to be."

Karen L. Frair

Associate Dean, School of Engineering
Professor, Mechanical Engineering

AS KAREN FRAIR was walking toward the Student Union, she overheard two male engineering students discussing a female student in one of their classes. One student queried, "Well, is she going to drop the class?" The other responded, "Yes, she is, because her parents told her to since she is the only woman in the class."

"That was like scratching nails across a blackboard for me," Frair says. "I thought, 'That gal has a lot of challenges to overcome.' And then I realized how lucky I was because my parents would never, never have said that to me."

In 1967, Frair was named Outstanding Engineer at the University of Tulsa. In 1974, she received her Ph.D. in mechanical engineering from the University of Oklahoma. And now, in the 1980s, when she attends class reunions, she is still the only woman. Funny thing, Karen Frair doesn't mind one bit.

"I had a good time," she says, recalling her college days. "It was a challenge for me. I enjoyed competing with the men in my classes. I never considered my being a woman a disadvantage whatsoever."

"My parents provided an environment that supported me in whatever I wanted

to do. It wasn't that they sat down with me and said, 'You can do anything you want.' It was the fact that I knew that from the way I was raised. If I had wanted to be a test pilot, a doctor, a nurse or anything, it didn't matter. They would have always been there supporting me in that decision. They never discouraged me."

Another person who has made a difference in the associate dean's life is Les Frair. He's her colleague, mentor, husband and best friend.

"He's made some sacrifices in his career because of my career,

BORN: January 26, 1945, Miami, Oklahoma.

PRESENTATIONS:

"Subtle Discrimination Against Women Faculty in Engineering," American Society of Engineering Education, June 1988; "You and Engineering," Expanding Your Horizons Conference, March 1987; "Linearized Free-Molecule Flow Induced by a Pulsating Sphere," Fifth International Conference on Mathematical Modeling, July 1985.

HONORS: Affirmative Action Faculty Development Award, CSUF, 1985 and 1986; Certificate of Teaching Excellence, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, 1978; Outstanding Young Women in America, 1977.

and I've made some in mine for him. But we don't feel like it has been a sacrifice, just a very strong mutual life. I can't imagine mine without him."

The couple met in a math class at the University of Tulsa, but it wasn't until they shared a pail of green paint that they decided to date.

"Engineers Week is one of the biggest celebrations on that campus," Frair says. "In honor of St. Patrick, the patron saint of engineers, we'd all wear green and drink green beer. The night before the ball, the Engineers Club would paint the campus green — with water soluble paint, of course. I happened to share a paint bucket with this fellow engineering student and eight months later we were married."

In a dual-career family, decisions are made with regard to both careers. For the Frairs the answer is simple — they're a team. It takes two positions to get these engineers to make a move and that's exactly what CSUF offered them.

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