

Dr. Constantine W. Curris, affectionately known as “Deno” in both professional and personal circles, is recognized as one of the nation’s most respected names in the field of higher education.

Growing up in Williamstown, where his family owned and operated Grant County’s first ice cream shoppe, “The King-Sized Dairy”, “Deno” learned to respect family, hard work, and the value of establishing and maintaining good relationships with customers and the community at large. These attributes have served him well.

Following his graduation from Grant County High School in 1958, “Deno” earned a Bachelor of Arts (B.A.) degree in Political Science from the University of Kentucky in 1962, and his Master of Arts (M.A.) in Political Science and Public Administration from the University of Illinois in 1965. Encouragement from his hometown prompted him to continue his education even further, and by 1967, he had earned his Doctorate of Education (Ed.D.) in Higher Education from the University of Kentucky.

In 1973, at age 32, Dr. Curris was named President of Murray State University, making him the youngest university president in Kentucky’s history. Following ten years at Murray, Dr. Curris served twelve years as President of the University of Northern Iowa, then nearly five years as President of Clemson University, in Clemson, South Carolina. In 1999, Dr. Curris was chosen as President of the American Association of State Colleges and Universities, a position he held until 2009.

Perhaps most influential, however, in shaping Dr. Curris’s outlook and leadership skills were two tumultuous years spent as Dean of Student Personnel Programs at Marshall University in West Virginia (1969-1971). Upon his arrival he found, similar to many college campuses of the day, Marshall experiencing much unrest and upheaval with racial tensions and opposing views and protests of the Vietnam War, but also simultaneously embroiled in various political scandals, and numerous NCAA violations. Tragedy then struck in 1970 when a plane crash claimed the lives of all 75 on board, including Marshall’s entire football team, boosters, and members of the Marshall community. Dr. Curris found himself one of three individuals tasked with notifying parents and next of kin, and in a position of leadership through days of grief and healing. These trying days and years ultimately became quite instrumental in defining his life and leadership philosophies: integrity of self, respect for others and their differences, and decisions made based upon what is the greater good -- which he acknowledges is not always able to foresee but is always the goal.

Dr. Curris has enjoyed multiple honors including being named to the UK Hall of Alumni, Distinguished College of Education Hall of Fame, various Board and Trustee appointments, and buildings named after him on the campuses of Murray State and the University of Northern Iowa.

Dr. Curris is married to Jo Hern Curris, a tax attorney. They are the parents of Col. Robert Alexander Curris, currently serving as Commandant of Psychological Operations at Ft. Bragg, North Carolina, and their daughter, Elena Diane, now deceased.