

# Glenn Poshard's final day

By Karsten Burgstahler | Posted: Wednesday, April 30, 2014 12:00 am

President says goodbye to staff, students

Glenn Poshard has served in Congress, Korea and at SIU.

But Wednesday he was just driving his car, and soon realized he needed to buckle his seatbelt.

"Won't be the first time I've broken the law trying to get from one campus to another and driving 85 miles an hour," he said.

Poshard was trying to be a law-abiding citizen as he received a panicked call from his wife, Jo. Jo was supposed to be on a plane to Washington D.C. for a conference, but was stuck in traffic and feared missing the flight. Poshard tried to reassure her the situation could be fixed.

"Don't panic. Everything's fine, you're gonna get out there," he said. "Honey, listen. Just change your flight to later in the afternoon. It's okay, that's the only thing you can do at this point in time."

But while helping Jo, he had a ticking clock of his own.

As he drove through the woods that separate the Stone Center from campus, he was preparing to say his final goodbyes. He was only seven hours from the end of his presidency.

The day started like any other. Poshard woke up and helped his wife prepare to leave for St. Louis. After a brief mishap that locked him out of the Stone Center, he entered his office and opened the curtains to a gloomy April sky. He looked out over the vast lawn at a giant iron statue, depicting what looked like melting Hershey's kisses, just beyond the glass.

"I've been in and out of this place for ... a number of years," he said. "I still don't know what that art (is). I have no idea what that is."

It's not the first time Poshard has pondered the world past the window. As he would later recall, during



## Glenn Poshard's final day

Glenn Poshard makes one of many phone calls Wednesday during his last day as SIU President at the Stone Center. Poshard spent his last day with normal daily tasks such as looking through his mail and setting up appointments, but also spent the afternoon on a tour of campus saying goodbye to faculty and students. SARAH GARDNER • DAILY EGYPTIAN

the 2009 derecho he watched as two 100-year-old oaks were torn from the ground and launched.

"I was so stupid for standing there," he said. "But that wind was so mesmerizing."

The trees left 13-foot-deep holes in the ground. Now there's nothing but grass and the abstract art firmly planted just feet from where he stood.

As he began to call some of his friends in Congress and at colleges across Illinois, he said he wishes people could see the little red fox that runs by his office every day about 4 p.m. The large board on his wall, once filled with his goals for the year, had been removed and stuffed beneath the Stone Center's central staircase. His office was barren beyond some office supplies, a few Illinois Blue Books and a signed copy of "Running for my Life" from former NFL running back Warrick Dunn.

A different Dunn, Randy, takes over for Poshard Thursday, and the two had a meeting scheduled Wednesday afternoon to talk about some last minute issues before Dunn officially meets the press and his staff. Before Poshard stepped down, however, he had a list of staff members he wanted to personally thank. And after he finished his calls and looked at his final mail, he got into his wife's car — which he warned might be strewn with his grandkids' toys — and made his way to the campus he presided over for eight years.

There was no band ready to play "Hail to the Chief" and no red carpet laid out when Poshard got out of the car for the first time at the Physical Plant. But it was clear how the employees felt about him — and his attire. Physical Plant director Phil Gatton said he felt slightly underdressed.

"You dressed up. I thought you'd dress down on your last day," Gatton said.

Poshard didn't exactly feel the same way.

"I hate ties," he said. "I'll never wear a tie again the rest of my life."

After thanking Gatton for all the work he's done, Poshard climbed back in the car. The first goodbye was complete. But there were five more stops on the tour.

Poshard turned right out of the Physical Plant but meant to go left, toward the Paul Simon Institute. As he pondered whether he could swing a quick u-turn, he received a sign from God, delivered by Vice President of Academic Affairs Paul Sarvela, who was seated in the front. A VW turned around right in front of Poshard, bringing back memories for Sarvela — further evidence Poshard is just like the rest of us when he gets behind the wheel.

"Remember when you told me to go for it up in Skokie and I got that ticket?" he asked. "We were going to a meeting and the light was yellow and (Poshard) yells, "Go for it big boy!" It was one of those ones where they take your picture. Week later I get a little love letter from the city of Skokie: you owe us a

hundred bucks."

Poshard moved from building to building on the tour he personally called the "go-down hoedown:" the Paul Simon Institute to Anthony Hall, to the Student Services Building, to Faner, to Rehn and to SIU Arena. He met with numerous administrators, each eager to give him credit he was equally eager to give back: Chancellor for Administration and Finance Kevin Bame, College of Business Dean James Cradit, Dean of Students Katherine Sermersheim.

Poshard seemed just as comfortable with each student he passed. He stopped to support a student bake sale, handing over \$10 for a few cookies. And just like a green freshman, he got lost in the Faner monster trying to find the dean's office.

As he pulled out of Rehn, he recalled a poem he once wrote about the hoards of blackbirds that covered the trees in his backyard.

"It said something like ... umm... oh, I can't remember it," he said. "Anyway, it was about 10,000 blackbirds covering the trees in the backyard, but there was this one little bird that would never go into those trees. He hung out in the rose bush next to our front door, which was full of thorns."

The poem asked the question why the bird chose to enter the thorns, he said.

"(The bird) didn't want to be with the crowd," Poshard said. "He wanted to be independent and go his own way."

Ultimately, Jo made her flight. Poshard made his meetings. The world kept spinning. But as Poshard considered his past, he remembered the time his dad dropped him off in front of Woody Hall (one of only two times he saw his father cry) and remembered his time spent as a student at SIU. As he drove back through the gates of the Stone Center for the final time as president, he made a remark.

"When I was running around here as a protestor in the late sixties, this house was coming up," he said. "I never dreamed that I'd ever be out here one day."

But just after 5 p.m. that fifty-year-old history came to an end. The university's list of presidents, which held a blank ending spot for Poshard, has been filled.

Glenn Poshard: 2006-2014.