

# PACIFIC BUSINESS NEWS

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## Chaminade soars on wings of its 'miracle worker'

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When Sue Wesselkamper was named president of **Chaminade University of Honolulu** 13 years ago, she became the first woman to head a four-year school of higher education in Hawaii. And she still has that distinction today.



Tina Yuen, PBN  
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Wesselkamper, 66, receives high praise for the financial stability and larger profile that the Catholic university has enjoyed since she joined Chaminade in 1995.

Because of those accomplishments, and the way in which she has achieved them, she is PBN's 2008 Women Who Mean Business Businesswoman of the Year.

Wesselkamper is modest about her accomplishments, but her commitment to Chaminade's success is seen through her hands-on approach in running the 53-year-old Kaimuki campus.

### Vigor and quiet determination

"Sue embraces her role as leader with vigor and a quiet determination, playing the role of tireless fundraiser and stretching the capacity of those who have the privilege of serving with her," said Chaminade Regent Sharon Weiner. "Dubbed a 'miracle worker', not only has she brought the institution onto solid ground financially, she

has raised the profile and standing of Chaminade University to new levels."

Wesselkamper's smart business sense and reliance on strategic planning has helped boost Chaminade's financial performance and community support. The campus's operating budget stands at \$30.8 million and total assets are \$34 million.

"We are like a business in that we too are responsible for the bottom line," she said. "We have to make sure that our team has what they need to be successful, and that's done through a planning process where priorities are set and needs are addressed."

Chaminade Provost Brother Bernard Ploeger says Wesselkamper's commitment to the school seems contagious in that she regularly brings in new donors.

"The quality of Sue that's outstanding is her ability as an inviter, to consistently get people interested in Chaminade," Ploeger said. "Few people I've met are as successful as Sue at being so natural and sincere in making you feel that you make a difference. That's been so important in attracting support for Chaminade."

Wesselkamper has taken the lead in Chaminade's \$50 million capital campaign, launched in 2001, to make improvements at the 70-acre Mediterranean-style hillside campus it shares with St. Louis School. She said the school will end the campaign this year after having raised almost \$58 million.

For the 2006-2007 fiscal year, the university brought in \$5.4 million in private gifts and grants and \$2.4 million in federal grants.

It benefits from Wesselkamper's no-nonsense attitude in ensuring that Chaminade stays on track.

### **'Appropriate impatience'**

"She has a kind of appropriate impatience in that she'll ask, 'Well, why isn't that solved?' and she won't accept the bureaucratic answer," Ploeger said. "Just her own personal tenacity gets things done, and she doesn't let the illness excuse her from her goals."

**Chaminade's administration team stepped in while Wesselkamper recovered from cancer surgery from the end of 2005 into spring 2006.**

**By taking a personal interest in the school's recruitment efforts, Wesselkamper has helped to more than double student enrollment numbers since she joined Chaminade.**

**"When President Sue came to Chaminade, the student body had shrunk to half of its present size [and] closure of the university was a distinct possibility," said Ronald "Zap" Zlatoper, chairman of the Board of Regents. "Since 1995, our day undergraduate enrollment has increased by 83 percent."**

**Wesselkamper said she tackles enrollment objectives by setting incremental goals.**

**"We have a capacity for 1,500 students and we're at 1,100," she said of undergraduate day students. "We're working on this in increments, so our goal now is 1,200 students."**

**An added 1,700 students account for graduate, evening and online students, bringing total current enrollment to more than 2,800, a record-high for the campus.**

**With Chaminade being the smallest of Hawaii's four universities, Wesselkamper has helped identify academic niches the school can fill.**

**It has set itself apart by integrating values education and community service into a diverse curriculum.**

**Chaminade offers several degrees that students can't get elsewhere in Hawaii. It also taps prospective military students by offering off-campus classes on military bases.**

**Among its 29 majors and programs, its interior design, forensic science and nonprofit-focused MBA programs are exclusive to the campus.**

**"We want to continue to grow and develop our programs," Wesselkamper said, noting plans for a new nursing program and expanding the school's teacher education programs.**

## **Community volunteer**

In the community, Wesselkamper volunteers her time to the Hawaii Alliance of Nonprofit Organizations, the Rotary Club of Honolulu and the Pacific and Asian Affairs Council. She also serves on board committees for Sacred Hearts Schools and Kamehameha Schools, as well as the American Council on Education's local Office of Women in Higher Education.

A native of Dayton, Ohio, she was dean of the School of Arts and Sciences at the College of New Rochelle in New York before coming to Chaminade.

A search committee persuaded her to take the job.

"I was excited about the Marianist philosophy that's holistic, stresses community service and focuses on preparing students for life with ethical values," she said. "Who wouldn't want to work at a place with those kinds of values?"

Wesselkamper lives in Waialae Iki with her husband, Tom, who is a part-time instructor at Chaminade.

What is the best business advice you have ever received? "No matter how worthy, relevant or compelling your idea or program is, if it does not show up as a line item in your organization's budget, it most likely won't happen."

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