I want to devote my column this issue to pay tribute to Gerald L. Francis, who is retiring from full-time work at Elon this spring after 41 years of service. During that time, he’s served as executive vice president, provost, vice president and dean of academic affairs, associate dean of academic affairs, and professor of mathematics and computing sciences. Gerry came to Elon in 1974 as an assistant professor of mathematics. As a faculty member, he was a winner of the Daniels-Danieley Award for Excellence in Teaching and also a recipient of the North Carolina Council of Teachers of Mathematics outstanding leadership award.

Gerry has been nothing short of a transformational figure in Elon’s history. When we dedicated the Gerald L. Francis Center in his honor in 2012, I reflected on his special qualities that were instrumental both to his personal success and to Elon’s success. I have modified my remarks below to share them with you:

I believe Gerry’s most outstanding leadership quality is his trustworthiness. I learned early on that one of Gerry’s most oft-repeated expressions in concluding a meeting is, “Gotcha covered.” You can take that word to the bank. He keeps his promises, is unfailingly diligent in following through and treats every person with respect and fairness. The fact is, Gerry built up so much trust over so many years with so many people that, we, the people of Elon, gained confidence to take smart and calculated risks, to dream to be great and to believe that we would be successful.

Second, Gerry possesses managerial brilliance. Moving athletics to NCAA Division I. Beginning a law school. Pursuing the highest professional accreditation for each professional school. Beginning a new graduate program in physical therapy. Building more than a hundred new buildings. Do you have any idea how complicated any one of these projects is? In any given year, Gerry was balancing five or six. Gerry thrives on thinking through the intricacies of these ventures with deans and directors, faculty, staff and trustees. His collaboration with Gerald Whittington, who is, in my estimation, one of the finest chief financial officers in all of higher education, has been a rare and special partnership to behold.

And it should never be forgotten that Gerry did all of these things informed by the experience of being a great teacher and professor at Elon.

Third, Gerry has a remarkable gift to bring people with competing points of view together for the overall good of the institution. Gerry is that metaphorical drop of oil that unsticks our institutional machinery on occasion. Through a combination of charm and humor, and appeals to our better natures, Gerry brings us together to accomplish great things. The polarized world we live in today would be a much more constructive and productive place if there were more people like Gerry Francis around.

In sum, he is as good of a man as you will find anywhere, and it has been one of my life’s great privileges to serve Elon alongside him.

Fortunately, Gerry will remain closely involved in Elon. He and his wife, Laine, will continue to reside in Burlington, and Gerry has agreed to take on a special

Gerry Francis: a great leader and friend

Gerry Francis at Elon’s 1986 Commencement ceremony
part-time assignment for Elon consulting with the Alamance-Burlington School System to assist with strategic planning, a project in which the university has a great stake, because the success of public schools is key to the health of our broader community and nation.

This spring when we were paying tribute to his career at the Board of Trustees meeting, Gerry commented that it is a great privilege in life when your colleagues are also your friends. I could not agree more. When you see or talk to Gerry next, please take a moment to thank him for dedicating his career to Elon and for being such a good friend to so many of us.

Leo M. Lambert
President

Zac Walker ’60 elected
Elon life trustee

The Elon University Board of Trustees has elected long-time board member Zachary “Zac” Walker III ’60 to serve as a life trustee.

He has been an Elon trustee since 1991 and has served as board chair, vice chair and founding chair of the athletics policy committee. The Walker Room and Terrace in Alumni Field House, the Walker-Chandler Lounge at Rhodes Stadium and Zac Walker Drive at the North Athletics Complex have all been named in recognition of his generosity.

Zac and his wife, Dot, have been devoted and passionate advocates for the university, carrying on the legacy of Elon pride established by Zac’s father, Zachary Walker Jr. ’30, a standout athlete, and Zac’s uncle, D.C. “Peahead” Walker, one of Elon’s all-time great coaches. The couple have endowed several scholarships at the university and generously supported many important university initiatives, including construction of the Ernest A. Koury Sr. Business Center, Rhodes Stadium, Alumni Field House and Hunt Softball Park.

In recognition of their support, Zac and Dot have been awarded Elon Medallions, the university’s highest honor for meritorious service by individuals. They have also been awarded the Alumni Distinguished Service to Elon Award and the Southern Conference Distinguished Service Award.

Walker is the seventh board member elected life trustee. Previously elected life trustees include Barbara Bass ’61, James Maynard, Wallace Chandler ’49, Dr. James Powell, Warren “Dusty” Rhodes and the late Robert LaRose ’66.