
Tribute

A Tribute to Geoffrey C. Godbey

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The Pennsylvania State University's Department of Recreation, Parks and Tourism Management is blessed with an extraordinary faculty. While each member of the department is distinguished by her or his own academic specialty, there has been one individual among them who has distinguished himself in a more global way. For more than three decades Geof Godbey's name has been synonymous with Penn State, and the university is bound to be a different place now without him. I say this because Godbey, as much as any other professor in our field, has had a monumental impact on recreation, park and leisure studies through his teaching, scholarship and service.

Godbey once described himself as a "pointy-headed professor" (Godbey, 1990a, p. 63). I will not argue that. He "loves the thrust and parry of debate, the theatrical pomposity of those who think themselves to have answers (and occasionally who do), the hide and go seek with the truth, the endless knocking on the door of the unknowable, showing off with numbers and startling statistical techniques, the invention of arcane terms to develop taxonomies which knock the common sense out of what we formerly knew in order to 'privatize' the truth, the cocksure pronouncement, which, like intellectual Chinese food, somehow leaves your mind hungry an hour later. You can only play in universities," Godbey insists, "if you feel at home in them" (p. 63). One of the things I will miss most about Godbey is his "at home ness" in the university, the joy and exhilaration he feels living in, and contributing to, the unfolding world of ideas.

I confess that when I first met Godbey in the 1980s, he intimidated me. He is, after all, a large man. Standing six feet four inches tall, with a shock of white hair, and the look of a scrappy dog that is ready to pounce if you show fear, I feigned courage to get through my first few interactions with him. To this day I don't know how I would have fared had I been one of his graduate students. Insecurity about oneself does not set well with a big dog. Godbey's *modus operandi* has been to challenge what he perceives to be weakness, to see what holds up under pressure. That style has served him well on campus, on the squash court, and on television. He has a presence about him, a confidence that commands your attention.

Godbey's self-assuredness comes not only from his intellect, but also from traveling and reading widely. "You can't be worth a damn as a professor

unless you read," he proclaims (Godbey, 1990a, pp. 65-66). He doesn't mean reading everything within the field of recreation, parks and leisure studies. He means reading *widely*, reading the latest of most everything that's been written. Over the years I have received scores of emails from Godbey alerting me to something significant he had just read, and I have many of those same books in my library that were gifts from him as well.

It is this gradual spiraling outward from a tightly focused interest on leisure to wider and wider views of how leisure relates to other dimensions of our lives and how other dimensions of our lives relate to leisure that marks the evolution of Godbey's career. He has been busy placing leisure into larger and larger contexts, thereby giving leisure larger and larger meaning. This has been especially evident in his recent forays to mainland China. He has blazed the trail for several of his colleagues. This is a desirable path for a mature professor, to integrate one's own learning into a more general understanding of, and appreciation for, the overall workings of things. In this regard, Godbey has come a long, long way. In doing so, he has brought our field a long, long way as well.

What separates Godbey from the rest of us is his media presence. He has served as the principal spokesman for our field in communicating the significance of what we study to the larger world. He has been interviewed on, and his work has been summarized in, a multitude of mass media outlets including *US News and World Report*, *Newsweek*, *Time*, *Reader's Digest*, *The Economist*, *The Today Show*, *Good Morning America*, *CBS Morning Show*, *New York Times*, *Glamour*, *Psychology Today*, *Wall Street Journal*, *USA Today*, *Washington Post*, *Modern Maturity*, *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, *Cosmopolitan*, *Redbook*, *The Utne Reader*, *NBC Evening News with Tom Brokaw*, *CNN News*, and *The ABC Evening News*.

Godbey's name will forever be associated with the Academy of Leisure Sciences as its past president (1987-1988), the Society of Park and Recreation Educators (SPRE) as its past president (1988-1989), and the American Academy for Park and Recreation Administration (inducted in 1990). His name will forever be associated with the National Recreation and Park Association's Literary Award (1986), SPRE's Distinguished Fellow Award (1990), and the Theodore and Franklin Roosevelt Award for Excellence in Park and Recreation Research (2001). His name will forever be associated with six editions of *Leisure in Your Life*, a text devoted to exploring the personal meanings of leisure to the lives of its readers (Godbey, 1981, 1985, 1990b, 1994, 1997a, 2003). His name will forever be associated with demographic research, time budget diaries, and *Time For Life: The Surprising Ways Americans Use Their Time*, co-authored with John Robinson (Robinson & Godbey, 1997). His name will forever be associated with forward-looking thinking in books like *The Future of Leisure Services: Thriving on Change*, *Leisure and Leisure Services in the 21st Century*, and *The Future of Leisure and Leisure Services—Toward Mid Century* (Godbey, 1988, 1997b, 2006). His name will forever be associated with Tom Goodale's in *The Evolution of Leisure: Historical and Philosophical Perspectives* (Goodale & Godbey, 1988) and Jack Kelly's in *The Sociology of Leisure* (Kelly

& Godbey, 1992). Finally, Godbey's name will forever be associated with Venture Publishing, a company he co-founded with his good friend and colleague, Frank Guadagnolo, dedicated to publishing "books that matter."

We will remember Godbey for his writing more than anything else. Professors, like every other living thing, are a transitory lot. We spend our lives with whatever amount of time we are given, doing pretty much whatever we choose to do. Whether we make a lasting difference with our work is a question best left to posterity. What lives on is what we do or write that is enduring, what does not crack under the scrutiny of the big dogs yet to come.

It has been my particular good fortune to know Godbey outside of university life. Beneath his large physique is an even larger heart. He has a self-effacing sense of humor, and a bottomless reservoir of one-liners. He is quick witted, and his Bob Dylan impersonation delights me every time I hear it. Godbey is a serious scholar who does not take himself as seriously as some people might think. His passions are gardening, cooking, reading, traveling, writing poetry, enjoying friends and family, and Penn State football. There are multiple layers of complexity to Godbey that enrich the lives of those of us who have the privilege and pleasure of calling him our friend.

Although Geof Godbey is now retired from the Pennsylvania State University, he is far from retiring. He recently formed Nextconsulting, a company that concerns itself with helping re-position leisure and tourism services for success in the near future. He continues to play squash regularly, and he continues to travel and read widely. More importantly, Godbey has more time now to write poetry, tend his vegetable garden, and enjoy eating low on the food chain. Now that he has bid farewell to The Pennsylvania State University, I dare say he has more time for life.

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