



Stockton Unveils Portraits of First Four University Presidents at Fifth President Harvey Kesselman's Inauguration Reception

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Galloway, N.J. – Stockton University unveiled portraits of the first four university presidents at a reception following the Sept. 23 presidential inauguration of fifth president Harvey Kesselman.

Stockton alumnus James Raczkowski, a New York-based artist, painted portraits of Richard E. Bjork, Peter M. Mitchell, Vera King Farris and Herman J. Saatkamp, Jr., at the request of Kesselman, who wanted to honor the contributions of each of his predecessors.

Madeleine Deininger, chair of the Stockton University Board of Trustees and a 1980 alumna, welcomed honorees, their families, and guests during the unveiling ceremony, and introduced President Kesselman.

“Stockton’s past is important to me,” Kesselman said. “Our past is the bedrock on which our present is realized and our future is built. Today, we celebrate Stockton’s history by presenting portraits of my predecessors.

“What you are about to see is the work of artist James Raczkowski,” he continued. “Mr. Raczkowski came to Stockton after serving in the military where he was trained as a tanker, infantryman and later in specialized security. He was deployed overseas and much of his work is influenced by those experiences.”

Kesselman shared the history of Bjork, Stockton’s founding president, represented at the ceremony by his wife, Joan Bjork, and daughter, Alison Bjork.

“Dr. Richard E. Bjork and the team he assembled were the architects of Stockton’s values and its innovative curriculum,” said Kesselman. “He was an astute administrator who recruited an outstanding faculty, build the campus and created a financially sound institution. He served as Stockton’s president from 1969 through 1978.”

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Joan and Alison Bjork then unveiled the portrait of Richard E. Bjork.

Kesselman then spoke of Mitchell, Stockton's second president, before unveiling his portrait with assistance from Deininger.

"I am sorry that Dr. Peter Mitchell could not be here today. I remember Peter with great fondness, and not just because he was the first Stockton president to hire me," he said.

"As president, he improved and expanded educational offerings for students, enhanced student services and continued the tradition of hiring and retaining quality staff – not an easy task given the growing casino industry at that time," Kesselman said of Mitchell, who served as president from 1979 through 1983. "He advocated for Stockton's general studies program, and he believed strongly that the institution had an obligation to engage with the surrounding community."

After unveiling Mitchell's portrait, Kesselman invited Farris' sister, Norma Briscoe; niece, Stephanie Roberts; and grand-niece, Heather Roberts-Williams, to the stage.

"What can I say about Dr. Vera King Farris? She was a force," Kesselman said. "She was a

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Rackowski