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William Greiner became the University at Buffalo's 13th president in 1991, and held the post for 13 years.

Buffalo News file photo

Former UB President Greiner dies at 75

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William R. Greiner, who went from the first person in his family to attend college, to Yale Law School to the presidency of the University at Buffalo, died Saturday in the Cleveland Clinic. He was 75.

Dr. Greiner, whose 13 years at the helm of the largest university in the state system included a return to Division I-A football, had been treated for heart problems at the Cleveland Clinic.

A native of Meridian, Conn., the only child in a blue-collar family, he worked his way through Wesleyan University and Yale Law, where he earned both a law degree and a master's degree in economics.

After his first job as a professor at the University of Washington, Dr. Greiner came to UB in 1967 as a law school professor, as the university's North Campus was being built on swampland in Amherst.

His first role at UB was writing a report in 1970 on campus unrest that occurred that February when students and police clashed in and near Norton and Hayes halls.

He gradually rose through the administrative ranks at UB, serving as associate provost at the Law School, associate vice president for academic affairs and acting vice president for academic affairs.

In 1984, UB President Steven B. Sample named Dr. Greiner provost, the university's chief academic officer.

When Sample left to take over the University of Southern California, Dr. Greiner became UB's 13th president.

During his 13 years as president, Dr. Greiner oversaw the construction of new buildings housing academics, student services, arts buildings and housing on the North Campus and creation of more of a residential university.

University fundraising improved and SAT scores went up during his tenure, as he tried to connect the university to the community and boost its economic impact on the region. He focused on the creation of research centers and how to translate research into commercial applications.

He finally retired from UB in October, after spending 42 years as an educator and administrator.

His retirement came while he was recovering from multiple bypass heart surgery.

"I was hoping to continue the next stage of my career in my mentoring role," he told The Buffalo News. "We'll see. I just have to focus on feeling better."

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