“What she’s accomplished at Temple, it’s monumental”

Dr. Elizabeth H. “Betsy” Barber’s story began nearly a thousand miles west of Philadelphia, in her hometown of Wapello, Iowa. The tiny town, nestled between Chicago and Des Moines, Iowa’s capital city, has a population only double that of STHM’s total enrollment. One of its more-notable natives is Barber’s grandfather — Edwin Richley Hicklin, a former United States federal judge.

A career in teaching was always Barber’s plan. But teaching tourism and hospitality management? It actually made perfect sense, she said. Barber was raised around tourism, a top-three industry in Iowa, trailing only agriculture and insurance. With outdoor attractions like the “Field of Dreams” filming location in nearby Dyersville, and Orange City’s annual tulip festival, and scenic spots along the Mississippi and Iowa rivers, Iowa “has become a landmark state that you just can’t skip,” Barber said.

Her upbringing was incredibly diverse, a credit to the steady encouragement of her parents. In high school, Barber headed student council, was a four-sport letterwinner, played in the band, and performed in stage shows. Her parents championed education and pressed her on where she would attend college.

After earning her PhD from the University of Iowa, she began her career in higher education, teaching for two years before accepting a tenure-track position in 1989 at Temple University. She became a junior faculty member in the Department of Recreation and Leisure within the now-defunct College of Health, Physical Education, Recreation, and Dance (HPERD), which went by “Hyper-D”.

In 1991, Barber was named the department’s graduate coordinator and challenged to oversee the PhD program. A few years later, Barber began writing the curriculum for an independent program in tourism and hospitality management. With a PhD in instructional design and technology, Barber possessed the background to design courses and tailor curriculum. She affectionately recalled those experiences as “the most fun I’ve ever had.” She turned over the curricula for Bachelor’s and Master’s degree programs to HPERD’s dean, and then to the university’s provost.

Not long after, Barber’s life changed forever when then-Temple President Peter Liacouras picked up a daily newspaper.

“Our school may never have come to pass if not for Peter Liacouras,” Barber said. “The story is a simple one: He was reading a newspaper article about booming industries in Philadelphia — hospitality and tourism — and he said, ‘Why don’t we have a program for this?’”

Liacouras commissioned a task force, comprised of university trustees, senior staff, and Barber, to determine Temple’s next move. The task force recommended to Liacouras that the School of Tourism and Hospitality Management be created and, on July 1, 1998, it became the first school of its kind in Philadelphia.

“Betsy was the driving influence on that task force,” said Dr. Ira Shapiro, STHM professor emeritus. “Her vision, in her words, was ‘to create a powerhouse of excellence,’ and she’s been guiding the school ever since. Temple’s motto is Perseverance Conquers, right? Well, Betsy gave her heart and soul to make this school a success. Back then, Jeffrey and I were just the cheerleaders, because she created the school, the curriculum, the Board of Visitors — she did everything.”

Some things never change.

Since STHM’s founding in 1998, Barber has been behind every faculty hire, curriculum redesign, and industry partnership. Her duties even spanned marketing, during those early days. The school’s first ad campaign featured Hooter, the mascot for Temple Athletics, wearing a tank-top on a beach or on a gondola in Venice. A year later, Hooter wore a business suit in the advertisements. The goal, Barber said, was “to demonstrate that our Owls will study abroad or take internships, but eventually, they grow into business leaders who manage their respective industries.” Barber remembers dispensing beach balls and Frisbees emblazoned with STHM’s name to Atlantic City beachgoers, and carrying balloons as the major sponsor of the Thanksgiving Parade in Philadelphia.

“She was able to let things come to her,” said Steve Korman, the founder of Korman Communities and the longtime chair of STHM’s