

Don Elser retires after 34 years

by George Denney

Professor R. Donald Elser of the speech communications and theatre department is retiring this spring quarter, after 34 years of service at the University.

But retirement to Elser means more of an opportunity to "finish plays that I am writing, re-do others and travel with my wife, Lois."

Whatever plans are being made by Elser for his retirement years, the benefits that faculty and students will enjoy because of his efforts in the teaching profession will be appreciated for many years to come.

His efforts at YSU began, however, not as a teacher but as a student. That was in 1931 when YSU was Youngstown College. "At that time," Elser said, "everything was in Jones Hall, including the library." He graduated in 1935 with a major in secondary education with concentration in English, history, theatre and speech.

For six years Elser then taught in three area high schools, Mineral Ridge, Chalker (in Southington), and Greenford, which is in the South Range school system where he now holds a seat on the school board.

During these six years, he wrote and directed many three-act plays which were performed at the schools. Professor Elser said that he became involved in theatre while studying English at Youngstown College. He said there is a direct correlation between English studies and theatre.

Professor Elser spent two years in the Air Corps, from 1943 to 1945. While stationed in St. Louis, he attended Washington University. He returned to YSU as a faculty member in January, 1946, and began teaching speech and English composition in the English Department.

He furthered his education by obtaining a Masters degree in English Literature from the University of Pittsburgh, did graduate work in radio and television broadcasting at New York University and attended the American Conservatory of Music in Chicago during the summer, where, he said, "Music and voice projection were emphasized in most courses I enrolled in."

During his teaching career at YSU, Elser has directed a number of stage productions both in the Dana School of Music, and the Theatre, including *Caine Mutiny*, *Antigone*, *Gypsy Baron*, and Gilbert and Sullivan musicals.

In the 50s, he directed a half-hour weekly radio variety show at WFMJ, along with eight half-hour television productions at WKBN.

Along with these activities and

teaching, Elser found time to write and produce many one-act plays. He considers five of them, representative of his best work. They are, "Balcony Scene" and "Special Guest" and "Pink Dress" which were tested on stage by YSU students. Names and pictures of casts appeared in the published play books. Also included are "Concert in the Park" and "A Ticket to the City," which was published by Samuel French of New York.

French is the largest publisher of plays in the world, according to Elser, and the year they published "A Ticket to the City," only 20 other one-act plays were published by them.

Elser has received, thus far, over \$10,000 in royalties from "Balcony Scene," which he considers his most popular play.

Elser also chaired the speech department for 16 years and coached the YSU debate and forensics team for five years.

One of the most important contributions to the University community made by Elser is the FM station, WYSU. "Eleven years ago I persuaded then YSU President, Pugsley, that we needed an FM station." Elser said that he and Steve Grcevich, director of broadcasting, who was instrumental in forming a high school FM station in Struthers, co-founded WYSU.

Elser said that the only thing he would rather do than teach, is write. Although it is apparent he has been able to do both equally well over the past 34 years, he will be able to concentrate on the latter during his retirement.

He and his wife, Lois, who is

a graduate of YSU, have four daughters, three who have graduated from the University and one who is a student here. One of the graduated daughters is an instructor at YSU in speech and theatre.

The Elsers have traveled extensively to Asia, Borneo, India, (Cont. on page 7)



R. Donald Elser

Elser

(Cont. from page 5)

Malaysia, Thailand, Russia, and most European countries. Elser expresses an interest in continuing to travel during retirement. He wistfully thought aloud, "You know, I really hope to get to Africa, Australia and New Zealand."

"I have been here a long time," Elser said, "and a lot of students have passed through my classes. Every once and a while, one will come up to me and tell me how much he appreciated something I said or did for him in a class he was enrolled in many years ago.

"It's this sort of thing that makes the teaching profession so satisfying. To tell the honest truth," Elser concluded, "there will be times in the future when I'm going to miss it very much."