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Inaugural king

Don Downing recalls his royal role in 1977

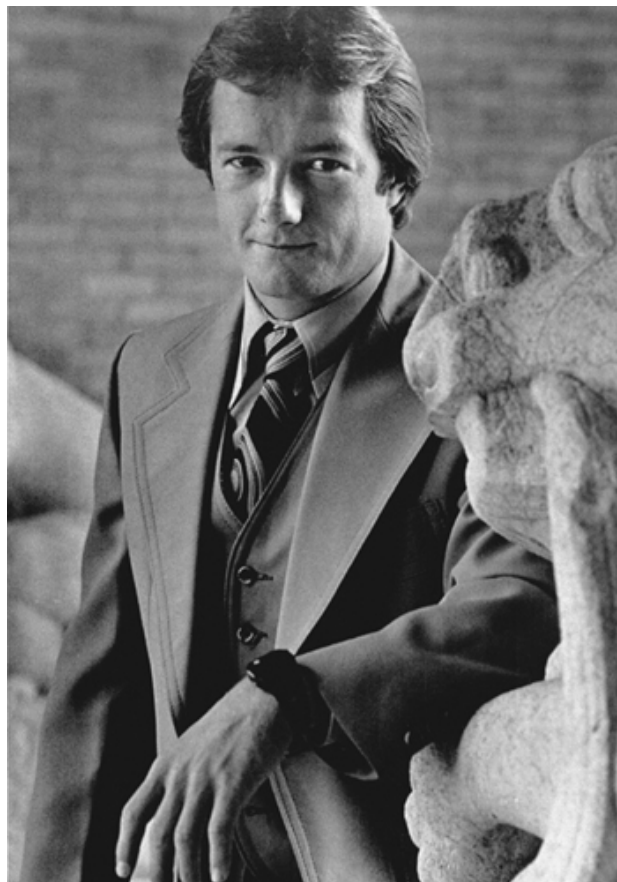
Story by Stephanie Detillier

Don Downing thought it was a joke when a friend called to say the Kappa Alpha Theta house had nominated him for Homecoming king. Historically, Mizzou Homecoming royalty had only included queens.

Downing, BS BA '79, JD '82, never learned whose idea it was to begin crowning a Homecoming king, but he proudly served as the university's first in 1977.

"It was an honor to be chosen by faculty, students and alumni who believed I would be an appropriate choice to represent the university," says Downing, now a St. Louis attorney and member of the University of Missouri Board of Curators.

Downing recalls that the 1977 king and queen selection process included an initial cut of nominees made by a faculty-student committee. After interviews, an alumni group selected the top five men and top five women, and students then voted for king and



Don Downing, BS BA '79, JD '82, a St. Louis attorney and UM Curator, was crowned Mizzou's first Homecoming king in 1977. 1978 *Savitar* photo

queen.

Downing, a Beta Theta Pi member, was well-known among his classmates. He was campus ombudsman, a Missouri Students Association senator, Phi Eta Sigma president, member of the Mizzou Alumni Association Student Board and Young Democrats, and head of Students for (Jerry) Litton, among other activities and honor societies.

Prior to the 1977 Homecoming game, the finalists attended a banquet in the Hearnes Center, and the king and queen, Mary Barnes Cupps, BJ '79, were announced. For Downing, the moment was bittersweet.

“My mom had just passed away the year before,” he says. “I remember talking to my dad and wishing my mom had been there.”

But overall, that evening, including being crowned at halftime, holds lots of fun memories.




“I remember a lot of congratulations from my fraternity brothers and them joking with me about what it meant to be Homecoming king. They asked where was my scepter,” says Downing, whose crown now sits somewhere in his basement. “There was lots of good-natured ribbing from my fraternity and dorm friends.”

With both of his sons enrolled at Mizzou, Downing enjoys not only reminiscing about his student days but also hearing about the university’s progress. “Now that I’m on the Board of Curators, I get to Columbia more often, and the campus has changed dramatically for the better since I went there. The dorms are better, the dorm food is better, and the classroom technology is state-of-the-art,” he says. “Homecoming is a great opportunity to go back to Columbia and relive some wonderful memories.”

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