A fitting tribute to Tacoma’s Haleys

If Fred Haley were still alive, he would no doubt be pleased with the first recipient of the new University of Washington Tacoma professorship established in his honor.

If UW regents approve, as they certainly should, the Fred T. and Dorothy G. Haley Endowed Professorship in the Humanities, will be filled by Michael Honey, a civil-rights historian who happens to be UWT’s leading civil-rights scholar and an antiwar activist.

Haley, who headed Tacoma’s globally known Brown & Haley candy company for three decades, died two years ago. We can only surmise that he shared Honey’s views on the war, but to say he was a card-carrying liberal would be an understatement.

Haley was liberal when it was dangerous to be one. His courage in standing up to a wave of McCarthyism against a Tacoma school counselor is one of the city’s great political legends.

Haley was on the Tacoma School Board in the mid-1950s when the counselor, Margaret Jean Schuddakopf, took the Fifth Amendment when the House Committee on Un-American Activities asked her if she had ever been a communist. There was no evidence she had ever been a party member, but a McCarthyite mob demanded she be fired.

Even though Tacoma’s business establishment was against him, Haley staunchly defended Schuddakopf and initially beat back efforts to dismiss her; ultimately, however, she lost her job.

Haley was ahead of his time on civil rights, too. He attended the great 1963 March on Washington and returned calling it “a religious experience.” He subsequently led efforts to desegregate Tacoma’s public schools. His wife, Dorothy, shared his passions for civil liberties and civil rights; she died in 2003.

All this would be reason enough to honor the Haleys, but Fred Haley also had a special connection to the UWT. After he left the school board, he relentlessly championed education reform and the establishment of a University of Washington campus in Tacoma – a dream he lived to see realized in 1990.

For years Haley was a force in demanding that Washington’s public schools be more than “education factories” minting graduates regardless of what they actually learned. That particular dream, embodied in the state’s WASL requirements, is only partly realized – which is a pity.

It was characteristically generous of the Haley family to endow most of the professorship, which will be supplemented by a matching contribution from UWT. Generations of UWT students will benefit from the vision Fred and Dorothy Haley shared.

© Copyright 2011 Tacoma News, Inc.