Well known to students and faculty as an extremely well-read and educated scholar, Dr. John Fortner, associate professor of Hebrew and the ancient Near East, earned the dedication of the 2002 Petit Jean with his exuberant teaching style and down-to-earth manner as well as his brilliant mind.

"Dr. Fortner has this incredible ability to make you forget how intelligent he really is and make you feel completely comfortable in his presence," said senior Kim Campbell, who worked for Fortner. "He makes me laugh every day when I come to work and is never condescending. I think that Harding hit the jackpot when they got Dr. Fortner."

A graduate of the Hebrew Union Theological Seminary, Fortner displayed his knowledge in the classroom—but in a non-intimidating way. "We sit in class and stare at him as he shoots off more information than we can process. It seems impossible to learn it all," said senior Gretchen Warmath, a student in Fortner's archaeology class. "Then he flashes that grin, and we all relax because we know it's going to be okay."

Dr. Fortner made a lasting impact on some students even before their arrival on campus through his work with Harding's Honors Symposium program, lending his knowledge of Old Testament history to the students' tabernacle-building project. "You get to see a whole new side of John Fortner when he acts out this fantasy of being a Levitical priest," said senior Clay Johnson, a Symposium counselor.

Because of his never-ending study and excitement for what he teaches, as well as his comforting and at-ease manner, this year's senior class chose to dedicate the 2002 Petit Jean to Dr. John Fortner.

Leading worship at Downtown Church of Christ's 8:30 p.m. communion service, Dr. John Fortner prepares to speak to students and church members. In addition to his academic work at the university, Fortner was active in the Downtown congregation.