

President's Founders' Day Address

Fred P. Pestello, Ph.D.

November 20, 2009

Greetings and welcome to Le Moyne College – home of the nationally acclaimed Dolphins!

Thank you for joining us on this wonderful festive night –one that we all look forward to each year. As you know, this event directly benefits our students thanks to the remarkable generosity of each one of you here tonight, and also thanks to our many other benefactors who could not be here but who have contributed in so many ways.

I'm frequently asked, "How are things going?" I can answer without qualification: We have had a phenomenal year at Le Moyne College.

The campus, our alumni, and friends of the College have been engaged in our OneLeMoyne conversations—answering the question "What must Le Moyne College become?" The response to my call to conversation has been enthusiastic. We are now in the midst of completing a compelling vision that will establish the course for our beloved College.

While we have been crafting our vision, we have also been on the move. During 2008-2009, one of the worst economic years since the Great Depression, we took actions that resulted in record-breaking success in student enrollment, exceeding our goals and achieving full residential capacity. On August 29 we welcomed the largest entering class in the history of the College. This significant accomplishment is a tribute to the spirit of hard work and collaboration on this campus.

Days before this event last year, I announced that Le Moyne College was the recipient of the truly transformative McDevitt gift of \$50 million—today worth \$60 million. As Father Donald Monan, S.J. described in his moving speech in Panasci Chapel on April 21:

. . . the magnificent gift that the College received this year, not only put in place an altogether new footing on which to build an endowment, it created national visibility for the college that was as unprecedented as it was welcomed. The

spontaneous joy with which the news of that gift [was met], wherever it was received, I believe, made unmistakable – the national recognition of Le Moyne and appreciation for its integrity.

Thanks to this gift, unlike most private colleges, we are incredibly fortunate to have a significantly larger endowment today than a year ago. Our endowment, now approaching \$100 million, is nearly double its previous all time high and nearly triple what it was a year ago! As a result, we are in the enviable position of looking at how to wisely invest our endowment earnings rather being forced to make budget reductions due to the endowment's decline.

And earlier in the fall I was pleased to announce another special gift. This anonymous gift from a devoted and generous alum is for \$4 million and is the third largest in the College's history. It brings our Achieving New Heights campaign to over \$90 million, far exceeding the \$50 million goal. At a time of a depressed economy and diminished philanthropy, our alumni and friends are investing mightily in us and what we do. The turnout this evening – with record-breaking attendance – is yet another testament to the tremendous support for Le Moyne.

In another important milestone, Le Moyne College was listed for the first time in The Princeton Review's "Best Colleges in the Northeast." This achievement is significant for many reasons. First, this is a highly trusted source. As Brian Harkins, Class of 1979, wrote to me, "I am delighted to hear this news! . . . In the NY Metro area, where I reside, many people consider what they write . . . gospel."

Second, The Princeton Review conducts a survey of current students in order to assess each of the schools included. Not all of the entries are entirely positive. But ours is impressive. It is perhaps the greatest affirmation we could have sought.

Listen to what our students say, for they capture a sense of what each of you already knows Le Moyne to be:

An 'academically challenging, but supportive school,' Le Moyne maintains a top-notch teaching staff and a bulletin full of 'interesting, intelligent, [and] engaging classes.' Professors are 'out of this world,' and 'the overall academic experience is one of the highest caliber, which constantly challenges the student to go further and achieve an understanding of the subject at hand, not just a completion of the assignment.' With few exceptions, professors are 'very accessible and approachable, always willing to lend an extra academic hand. . .'

Taken together there is no doubt that the past year has shifted and accelerated our trajectory toward greatness. Our recent achievements suggest that this moment is a turning point in the history of Le Moyne College, with many wonderful possibilities ahead.

And this month we again made news across the nation. You may have heard that on November 3, in an exhibition game at The Carrier Dome, the Le Moyne Dolphins beat the Syracuse Orange. I have seen a lot of college basketball. I was there at the Dome that night and that game was about as exciting as it gets.

The lead went back and forth in the final minutes. Syracuse went ahead 79 to 78 with 22 seconds left to go. And there we were. We were up against a ranked Division One team, on their court, surrounded by their loyal fans. Under conditions considerably less lopsided than this, I have seen many a basketball team fold. Instead, we stayed as strong and as poised as we had been all night and went on to win 82 to 79.

What does that win mean beyond an exhibition game victory? I believe that it is an example of the excellence that rests at the heart of all of our programs and all that we do. It reflects the dedication and wisdom of our coaches, our faculty, and our staff. It powerfully demonstrates the character, determination, and spirit of our students, particularly our student athletes.

The day after the big win I was interviewed by Channel 9's Keith Kobland who asked me "Was there a Higher Power at work last night?" I replied: "We like to think that the Higher Power is involved in more significant things than the outcomes of sporting events. But certainly we are people of faith and we act in certain ways because of it. And those actions help us in everything we do."

When I reflect upon where we were as a College last year at this time, I am struck most of all by our momentum. All across the campus, we are proud of our mission and identity. In a time of such economic recession, with worries about corruption and greed, places like Le Moyne College stand out for our values. We honor the dignity of the individual. We introduce students to a world of discourse about the life of the mind. We emphasize work in the pursuit of justice, and crafting a meaningful life in community with others. We emphasize integrity, build idealism, and strengthen faith.

The days of Le Moyne being a hidden gem are over! We are being recognized on a national scale for who we are and what we do. We are not changing our core values or our core identity in order to gain this attention. The attention is coming *to* us. The world

is seeking us out. As I said last year in several different public speaking engagements, the world needs places like Le Moyne College now more than ever. And tonight we gather to celebrate the perfect example of why – two of our distinguished alumni, Dr. James Longo and Christine Zapf-Longo.

Jim and Chris embody the distinctive graduates we strive to form here on the Heights. They exemplify engaged citizens who have crafted meaningful lives in community with others based on integrity, idealism, and a strong faith. But before you learn more about them and their wonderful life together, I want to mention a special initiative that they have spearheaded. It is a perfect example of their efforts to help Le Moyne students.

As undergraduates, both Jim and Chris were close to Father Frank Nash, a Jesuit who served as College Chaplain during their years here and also married them in 1980. To recognize Father Nash's impact on so many during his time at Le Moyne, the Longos have worked with the College to create the Francis J. Nash, S.J., Scholarship. Father Nash, please stand and be recognized.

The Longos personify that which makes our College so remarkable. They met and fell in love here, as so many of our alums do. They have each gone on to find success and fulfillment professionally and personally, yet they have not strayed far from the Heights. Through words and pictures, we now present the story of Jim and Chris Longo.