

President's Founders' Day Address

Fred P. Pestello, Ph.D.

November 19, 2010

[President Pestello's remarks were preceded by a viewing of Le Moyne College's new 30-second commercial.]

One of America's best colleges is right here in the heart of New York State. And you are a part of what makes this College one of the best. Thank you, each and every one of you, for joining us on this festive night of celebration.

In September I began my third annual fall address to the campus with two words: "Dolphins soaring! Dolphins soaring!" I could think of no better imagery to describe the current state of our campus.

We are in a very fortunate position. Thanks to the hard work of our talented faculty and staff, the generosity of our friends and alumni like you, the character of our students and the appeal of our mission, Le Moyne College is on a roll. And we are being widely recognized across the nation for academic excellence in the Jesuit tradition.

We have garnered a long list of accolades. For the first time, Le Moyne was included in the list of "Military Friendly Schools" compiled by *G.I. Jobs* magazine. That places us among the top 15 percent of schools nationally that are taking significant steps to embrace America's veterans. For the second year in a row, The Princeton Review named Le Moyne as one of the "Best Colleges in the Northeast." *U.S. News & World Report* rankings raised our position two slots among regional colleges. Even more impressive, Le Moyne is ranked number two in the region for a "strong commitment to teaching" and is one of only four such colleges that were so identified. Earlier this month we learned that Le Moyne, for the first time, was included in the top 100 list of *Kiplinger's Personal Finance* best values in private universities that deliver a high-quality education at an affordable price. It is quite a heady thing to be on the same list with schools like Harvard, Princeton and Yale, but I believe this is just the beginning of long-overdue recognitions for the strength of the education we offer here at Le Moyne.

And by now I hope that you have all heard about the recently released *Washington Monthly* rankings. *The Washington Monthly's* rankings are an extraordinary affirmation of what we do here at Le Moyne to prepare our students—many from lower socio-economic backgrounds—for success in life and work. It was thrilling to see that out of 551 master's level colleges that were ranked, Le Moyne was number five, which places us in the top one percent.

As our reputation spreads and our ratings soar, we are attracting a record number of new students. For the second consecutive year, we enrolled the largest class in Le Moyne's history. This fall, 626 new full-time first-year students became dolphins. Early indicators lead us to believe that next year's class will set the third consecutive record.

And there have been many other achievements to celebrate. In June we marked the completion of the *Achieving New Heights* campaign with a glorious party. The campaign raised \$91 million on a \$50 million goal. Thanks, in large part, to the success of our campaign, we are in the midst of the largest building and renovation project since the College was founded.

I want to thank all of you who participated in the campaign and made it such a success. Most of all we owe an enormous debt of gratitude to Bob and Kay McDevitt. The McDevitt gift raised Le Moyne to another level, through both the national recognition we received and the transformation it creates. That \$50 million gift not only provides significant support to our faculty and academic programs, but will also have a lasting impact on the entire campus.

A momentum that serves to differentiate us as a premier Jesuit college has taken hold upon The Heights. Our faculty, staff, and administration are responsible for it and the Le Moyne student body is the beneficiary.

In these times, Le Moyne College, grounded in our Catholic and Jesuit mission, stands out for its values. We honor the dignity of each person. We introduce students to new worlds of discourse and to the life of the mind. We emphasize work in the pursuit of justice and prepare our students to craft a meaningful life in community, to stand for and with others. We stress integrity, build idealism, and strengthen faith.

And our students model our convictions, every day and in quiet, unheralded ways. I want to share but a single example by reading a letter that was sent last week to our swimming coach, Dr. Joe Hannah. As you may know, the Le Moyne swim team volunteers on Sunday afternoons, providing instruction in our pool and working with young persons who are disabled.

Dr. Hannah,

I am writing to you to let you know what a wonderful service that the Le Moyne swim team is providing for the Advocates group every Sunday afternoon in your facility. My 16 year old son Dylan attends these sessions. All of the students have been engaging and friendly, however, I am writing to point out one student in particular.

This past Sunday, Maureen McDonough spent nearly the entire hour swimming with Dylan in the deep end of the pool. She could have decided to make Dylan go back in the shallow section with the rest of the group. She didn't. What she did do was ask me if Dylan could go with her into the deep section and asked very thoughtful questions about Dylan and why he was holding his hands over his ears. After my brief description of how he doesn't like noise, crowds or being told no, she followed his lead and let him do his thing. Dylan doesn't speak and life is sometimes challenging for my wife and I, so you can imagine what Maureen must have felt like as she ventured into uncharted waters (literally!) with Dylan. He even became a little agitated near the diving board so Maureen spoke to him reassuringly and in such a way that he calmed down.

In a world where we are all busy finding our own way, the event I witnessed last Sunday was truly rare. The swim team, the college and her parents need to know what a remarkable person Maureen is. If the impact we have on others less fortunate than ourselves is a measurement of our success in life, than Maureen has already accomplished more in her life than most people ever will.

*Thanks again for the use of your facility.
Esteban and Lisa Gonzalez*

It is because of young dolphins like Maureen McDonough that our alumni and friends are investing mightily in us and what we do. The turnout this evening is a profound testament to the tremendous support that Le Moyne enjoys and an affirmation of the extraordinary man we have gathered to honor.

Tonight, in record numbers, we join together to pay tribute to Monsignor Robert Yeazel—arguably one of the most admired people in the Syracuse region. He is a man who reflects the values and ideals to which we aspire at the College.

Ordained in 1967, Monsignor Yeazel has served in over twenty different professional roles ranging from Secretary to the Bishop and Priest Personnel Director to Pastor of Holy Cross Church and Vicar General of the Diocese of Syracuse. His contributions to the Church and the countless other organizations he has served have made each stronger.

Tonight, however, we gather not simply to recognize him for all he has done for the Diocese and the charitable and educational institutions he has worked to advance, but also to honor the man who has directly impacted so many families and individuals.

A person can go almost anywhere in this region and mention Fr. Yeazel's name and hear story after story about how he has touched someone's life. He is generous with his time, always knows the right thing to say, and is genuinely concerned for his many friends, parishioners and colleagues. Wherever he travels the Monsignor brings a sense of peace and warmth. He has a gentle manner combined with a sharp wit and great sense of humor. A man of conscience, he knows just how to comfort, when to motivate, and always serves to inspire.

On a personal note, I will be forever grateful to Monsignor Yeazel for chairing the presidential search that brought me here to Le Moyne College. I recognized very quickly that the Holy Spirit operates through Fr. Yeazel. He was incredibly skilled and kind throughout the process. The Monsignor always knew just when to call, just what to say, and just how to say it. And no one has been more encouraging since I entered the job. He truly is a man for all seasons.

Ladies and gentlemen, I am honored to present to you Le Moyne College's 2010 Simon Le Moyne Award winner, the Reverend Monsignor J. Robert Yeazel, Vicar General of the Diocese of Syracuse.

[President Pestello returned to the podium following Monsignor Yeazel's remarks.]

I am returning to the podium to share one more insight into the special man we are honoring this evening. A few weeks ago I received a touching hand written letter from Bob that I want to read to you.

Dear Fred,

In 1998 when Father Bob Mitchell asked if I would be a member of the Board of Trustees, I never realized what a blessing it would be to me and the Diocese and that is exactly what it has been, and for that I thank you and your predecessors.

You know that the limelight is something that I avoid, but as we approach Founders' Day, I pray that whatever I can do to gain support for Le Moyne will bear that fruit.

Also, I am not wealthy but through these years, Le Moyne has been a moving force in my life and in my spirituality and I would like to thank you and the college with this modest gift to be used as you see fit.

*With every prayerful good wish, I am,
Gratefully yours,
Bob*

Enclosed with the letter was a check that, for a priest who lives on a modest stipend, was amazing in its size. I was speechless. Fr. Yeazel scrimped and saved and has invested in Le Moyne. His generosity knows no bounds.

Tonight I am pleased to announce that we are going to use that check as the first gift towards a permanent endowed scholarship named after Monsignor Yeazel. Each year one student here at Le Moyne with substantial financial need will be the beneficiary of those funds.

Now I am asking each of you here this evening to consider being generous in the same spirit as Fr. Yeazel. For each dollar that you contribute to the Monsignor Yeazel Scholarship Fund, Le Moyne College will match you dollar for dollar. Every one of your dollars means two dollars for the fund.

If you are interested in contributing, please indicate such in either the guest books that are prominently placed in the coat check area or those being circulated by members of the Institutional Advancement staff.

Please join me in one more round of applause for Monsignor Yeazel.