

THE COMMUNITY'S COLLEGE –
SHAPING TOMORROW TOGETHER

INAUGURATION SPEECH

by

PRESIDENT R. THOMAS FLYNN

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 28, 2000

Thank you, John, and a special thanks to all of our current and past Trustees, many who are here today. You have provided the vision and guidance that has assured that Monroe Community College has served the needs of this community.

And to all our business, education and community leaders, alumni, students, family and friends, thank you for this opportunity and this honor.

Let me also thank all of those who took time from their very busy schedules to share their kind remarks with us today. And I would be remiss if I did not give a special thanks to Lucien Morin, my friend and Monroe County's "Mr. Community."

Thank you, Chancellor King, for being with us today. I appreciate your presence and your encouraging words.

Today, I will be challenging myself, this community, and everyone here on important matters confronting us – and Chancellor, I am confident that Monroe Community College can count on your continued support in addressing these challenges.

Through your convincing leadership, I know that the trustees of SUNY, the state legislature and the Governor will recognize that to maintain a strong and vibrant economy in New York State, community colleges must be an integral part of education, workforce development and training.

Let me also acknowledge those who participated in the procession – the many college presidents and other institutional representatives – so many of my close friends.

Thank you for sharing this day with us.

Our international students – who add to the vibrance of today with your colorful homeland dress and the flags of your countries. Your diverse cultures strengthen our learning environment and enrich us all.

And with great pride, I thank our outstanding faculty and staff and all of our distinguished retirees who have joined us for today's celebration. You continue to make MCC the institution it is – recognized internationally and valued locally.

And, if you will indulge me, I would like to introduce members of my family, who have supported me in so many ways. You have met my brother Dick, a college president, a renowned author and an international educator. His wife Jani is also with us.

Let me also introduce my sister Pat, a very successful businesswoman from Pekin, Illinois, who is now retired and playing a lot of golf in Florida. Her husband Steve is with us as well.

And then of course, there is one person here who made it all happen for me – and my siblings – that is our mother, Myrtle Flynn. She and Dad, who unfortunately passed away ten years ago, each had a profound impact on our work ethic and value system. I know she is very proud today.

Let me also introduce two very special MCC graduates:

Our son Robert and daughter Michelle. Robb, who continued his education and graduated from SUNY Binghamton, dedicated nine years as an actor in Hollywood, California and is now with one of the software gaming companies in the Silicon Valley. Michelle, a graduate of Seton Hall University, will soon graduate with a master's degree from Buffalo State. She works in the Transfer and Placement Office here at Monroe Community College.

And finally and perhaps most importantly – the one person who has been with me every step of the way for 37 years, the person who has served as my partner, my advisor, my friend, and the person who enjoys MCC as much as I do, my beautiful wife Kate. Many of you know her for all of her volunteer work here at MCC and in our community. Kate, thank you very much for always being there.

For months, more than 50 members of our faculty and staff have enthusiastically planned the many details for this inauguration. These are very busy people. I recognize their commitment and thank everyone who has helped to make this day a very special celebration of Monroe Community College.

I especially want to acknowledge Barbara Connolly, Dean of Academic Services at our Damon City Campus, and Cynthia Cooper, Director of Public Affairs, for co-chairing the committee.

In planning this event I asked them to honor two requests: to ensure that the Committee members have fun, and that this is *not* a celebration about the president, but about Monroe Community College and our community.

Barb and Cynthia, you have met that challenge. Thank you!

Today IS a celebration.

A celebration of diversity.

A celebration of dedication.

A celebration of excellence.

A celebration of our past and our potential.

Today is a day to celebrate and reflect upon our strengths as an institution, and the accomplishments that we have achieved together.

Today is also a celebration of the drive and the spirit of those whose vision, whose undying determination, whose commitment to educational access paved our way to the educational excellence that has made MCC one of this country's most highly regarded community colleges.

We are gathered here today in a building named for MCC's founding trustee, the visionary Dr. Samuel J. Stabins.

And sitting in this audience are David Good and his lovely wife Carol. David is the son of Dr. LeRoy Good, the first president of Monroe Community College, who together with Dr. Sam Stabins and MCC's first insightful trustees mounted a platform and championed a cause that changed the face of educational access in this community forever.

In the beginning, theirs was a noble yet single-minded purpose. To provide this community with desperately needed, skilled nursing professionals. And they succeeded.

Since then, MCC has graduated more than 3,300 nursing students – and over 55,000 students in our career and transfer programs. All told, over the last 38 years over 300,000 individuals have come to MCC for education and training.

Without question, this college has established itself as a vital access point to higher education and a key provider of workforce training.

We have achieved this reputation by broadening options for our transfer students and by building partnerships with other colleges and universities, many represented here today. Each year MCC transfer students continue to be a significant part of their student bodies.

Likewise, we have consciously aligned our programs with the evolving needs of local business and industry. We have another record enrollment this fall. In all, we will have more than 30,000 students access our education and training programs during this academic year. Many are or will become part of our local workforce.

By listening and responding to the needs of our business and industry friends, we have developed new career-oriented programs and opened two campuses in the last eight years: The Applied Technologies Center and the Damon City Campus. And, through a unique partnership with the city and the county, our fourth campus, the Public Safety Training Facility, will open next fall.

In committing ourselves to helping our community, we have developed innovative educational systems and programs that have become benchmarks of excellence for community colleges nationally and internationally.

Our vision has served this community well. MCC has earned high praise for our practices, our programs, our teaching, our campuses and our services.

Today is also a celebration of the *progress* we have made in advancing our mission.

Much of that progress evolved under the leadership of Monroe Community College's third president, Dr. Peter A. Spina. During his 18 years as president, MCC was transformed from a local educational resource to the nationally recognized college it is today.

Dr. Spina extended the vision of Dr. LeRoy Good and Dr. Sam Stabins. He moved MCC forward – building invaluable partnerships with local industries and businesses, and with other educational institutions throughout the world. Pete, thank you for your visionary leadership, your mentorship, and your friendship.

I have been blessed with many gratifying opportunities throughout my professional career – as a basketball coach at the University of Montana, as a math teacher in Florida, as a dean at Rutgers University, and in helping launch a community college in New Jersey.

It was in 1974 that the Monroe Community College Board of Trustees asked me to join them in their quest to establish MCC as one of the very best community colleges in the nation.

For the 26 years I served as a vice president at MCC, I always said I had the best job in America. But in the last 11 months as President, I now recognize that Pete Spina had the best job. He just let me think that I did.

Today I celebrate not only the privilege of working for Monroe Community College but I celebrate those who are and have been connected with MCC.

You've heard from a few of them today.

Professor Tom Proietti's voice may be familiar. If you haven't had the remarkable experience of sitting in his classroom, you may have heard him in your living room. Tom is a media analyst and is interviewed frequently by local television, radio and newspapers.

Professor Proietti represents the hundreds of extremely talented MCC faculty who come from all parts of the United States, whose dedication to our students and contribution to the larger community make Monroe Community College the very best community college in this nation.

Today we celebrate these dedicated professionals.

From our facilities team to our professors – their roles may vary widely but their strengths are fiercely bonded in their allegiance to our students and this community. I thank you for your continued dedication.

Today is also a celebration of our students and our alumni.

During my tenure in higher education, I have had the wonderful experience of working with thousands of students. Students who have entered every profession in this world of ours. Students who continually inspire me. Students like Maggie Wiley and George Moses and graduate Steve Sanford, all who shared comments earlier. And student Aubrey Srednicki, who wrote me a beautiful letter asking if she could sing at this inauguration, and so many others who have walked through the doors of MCC seeking an opportunity to achieve a better life. Students who have enriched our lives in their quest to better their own.

The opportunity to watch the growth in our students has been energizing, inspiring, challenging, and personally rewarding.

Yes, Monroe Community College has made a difference in hundreds of thousands of lives.

And just as our efforts have made a difference in the lives of our graduates, they in turn have made a difference in the lives of others.

Our community has been vastly enriched by our graduates in business, education, healthcare, public safety and government. Our lives have been immeasurably touched by their dedication to our community.

Indeed, Monroe Community College graduates are the lifeblood of the Greater Rochester community.

The law enforcement officer who responds to your emergency was probably trained at Monroe Community College. The nurse who calms you, the firefighter who protects you and the dental hygienist who lectures you on the virtues of flossing were likely MCC students.

We can point to Attorney Robert Brennan, past chair of the Monroe Community College Foundation. He will be the first to tell you that, had it not been for Monroe Community College, he would not be practicing law today.

And all Rochesterians know Police Chief Bob Duffy, who credits MCC for starting him on his career path. And Chief Duffy is becoming one of the most respected and well-known police chiefs in this country.

There are thousands upon thousands of other students, each with their own personal story, alumni who come back to us and say, “Thank God for MCC; you were here, I needed you, you helped me begin my career.”

But MCC didn’t accomplish this alone.

Our success in serving students has *always* had a direct correlation to the strength of our ties to this community.

Today we celebrate our partners – business, industry, government, education and community agencies.

The collaboration and cooperation of our community’s leaders have been fundamental to MCC’s long-term success.

We are fortunate that County Executive Jack Doyle and the Monroe County Legislature recognize that Monroe Community College is not an expense item in the county budget, but an investment in the future of Monroe County.

We are fortunate to have the support of Rochester Mayor William Johnson. We share with him a vision and a commitment to the city of Rochester.

Mr. County Executive, Mr. Mayor – thank you both for your kind remarks today. I look forward to our continued collaboration on behalf of this community.

We are also strengthened by our partnerships with local businesses and industries. During the first 11 months of my presidency, I have sat and talked with executives from Xerox, Gleason, and Wegmans. I have met with industry leaders from Kodak and Bausch & Lomb, and I have had discussions with small, entrepreneurial manufacturing firms.

I’ve realized, as never before, the important partnering role that Monroe Community College must play in this community.

In meeting with our industry, business and government leaders, no matter what the agenda, our discussions always turn to the shortage of qualified workers in the Rochester area. We need to recognize that Monroe County’s economy, with a growing number of available jobs, is not being matched by a growth in our population.

With our low unemployment rate, every segment of our business community finds itself competing with its neighbor for employees. It does not take a rocket scientist to recognize that if we do not have a population growth that matches our workforce needs, we must maximize our human capital in other ways. We must create learning opportunities for those who are not yet qualified for positions in the workforce and we must attract new employees to the area.

Recently, I had the privilege of being a guest of the Toyota Corporation as MCC was recognized as one of the top service technician training sites in the United States. At that meeting, I learned that during the next few years Toyota will increase the number of service technicians by more than 25 percent. General Motors, another one of our partners, projects similar job growth. And that growth is less than one-half of what is being projected for the information services industry.

The writing on the wall is very clear.

Technology is shaping our world. Technological skills are critical to our workforce and essential to our success in maximizing our human capital.

Each year, technology is advancing more rapidly, and those who are technically unskilled are being left behind. Increasingly, technological ignorance and inexperience are widening the digital divide.

Former Labor Secretary Robert Reich calls our country “the most unequal of all advanced societies” in terms of income and wealth. We are unequal, he says, because of two great forces – technology and globalization. We are unequal, he says, because education and access to education are unequal.

Friends, be assured, the wonderful opportunities that technological advances are bringing to the “haves” are pushing down the “have nots.” It is absolutely essential that we recognize the importance of developing the education and training programs necessary so that all members of our community may successfully participate in this changing world of ours. Right now, these programs are not in place. Right now, unless you have the opportunity to engage in the technological world through work, home or education, you are being left behind.

I have the privilege of working with some of the finest college presidents in this country. They are right here in the Rochester area at our many colleges and universities. Today you heard from Al Simone and Chris Dahl. They are doing great things in their institutions. But I can assure you that all of us are concerned about the impact of the digital divide upon our society.

If we can stand here today celebrating our extremely successful history and our strong partnerships – then certainly we can call upon the vast resources we have available to work together for one additional celebration.

The celebration of our unlimited potential.

Let’s call upon those vast resources to work together so that the digital divide will be as unfamiliar a term to the next generation as “dot-com” or “e-commerce” once were to this generation.

We owe it to this community. We have a responsibility to build upon the tradition of excellence and access, to invest in new technologies, to increase innovative partnerships, to interpret our obstacles as

opportunities for improvement, and to develop the programs that lead to a more technologically skilled and equal community.

Community colleges are well positioned to address this problem. Former Labor Secretary Reich recognizes our advantages, calling community colleges “the great unsung heroes” in bridging the digital divide. We, at MCC, will continue to push the envelope in this technological age. We will continue to educate those at all rungs of our economic ladder.

And as I close my remarks and we leave this celebration today, I ask that we all dedicate ourselves to listen and answer the call of our community.

The issues may be global, but our solutions are local.

In fact, just two weeks ago, a report from the Common Good Planning Center benchmarking the Rochester region concluded that this is “... a region endowed with excellent natural and human resources ... which are not being used as effectively as they might be in order to generate the growth and development needed to maintain those assets.”

This is the challenge we face.

And I am confident that if we have the will, we do have the capacity and knowledge to close this gap in our society. Let’s commit ourselves to that objective.

As President of Monroe Community College, I pledge to do everything in my power to ensure that MCC – in partnership with our governments, businesses, industries, and educational institutions – will lead the way in listening and responding to our community.

We are the vital link.

We know where we must go.

We know what we must do.

I know we are up to the challenge.

Thank you all very much for being with us today.