

Fall 2009

A View from Melrose

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Recommended Citation

Hellie, Thomas L. (2009) "A View from Melrose," *Linfield Magazine*: Vol. 6 : No. 2 , Article 2.
Available at: https://digitalcommons.linfield.edu/linfield_magazine/vol6/iss2/2

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Fuel for inspiration

Whenever my schedule permits, I stroll over to Dillin Dining Hall for lunch. I order something that looks good, pay my bill, and take my tray to a table populated by students. I always ask the occupants if I may join them, and I've never been turned down, though a pair once warned that they were willing to talk but I had to understand that they were in a hurry to finish and depart!

If I'm talking to first-year students, there is usually some hesitation and nervousness. ("What does he want to know about us and why is he here?") Sophomores, who have already learned that the eccentric president drops in on lunch, are a bit more forthcoming, often ready to make culinary suggestions. Upperclassmen are the least surprised or intimidated; they simply clear a space, finish their conversations with each other, and ask how I'm doing.

I eat lunch with students for several reasons. For one thing, it's usually a pretty good meal! But the freshmen are partly right about my motives: I do want to learn about them. We usually talk about their reasons for coming to college, their experience so far and the changes they'd like to propose. I also make sure to ask what they like about Linfield, and I'm pleased that they like much more than they dislike. In fact, there's usually a very long pause when I ask what they would like to change at the college.

Over the last three and a half years, I've had lunch with more than 500 students. And while this isn't a scientific survey, I've found some common themes. There are a few common suggestions for change: more variety in the dining hall (particularly at the end of the semester, when the menu seems old); newer or more expansive facilities in a few areas of the college; easier and faster access to Portland (hard to accomplish until a bypass is built around Dundee and Newberg).

But there are many things they like about Linfield College. First, our students feel at home here. They talk about the friendliness, the feeling of acceptance, even the remarkable politeness. "At Linfield, everyone opens doors for everyone else – is that typical of college life?" one student asked me. If they've studied abroad, they're passionate about what they did and learned. Many are involved in athletics, the arts or campus organizations. Invariably students talk about the small, personalized classes, and they praise the faculty and staff.

This issue of *Linfield Magazine* describes some of those faculty and staff. Anne Kruchten is not only a fine young teacher, she is doing cutting edge research in



collaboration with her students. Rob Gardner's work on homelessness has inspired many of his students; not only are they conducting research, they are serving the greater community. And groundskeeper extraordinaire Carol Gallagher has not only turned Linfield into the city's most beautiful garden, she has mentored and supervised a host of student assistants over the years. From her they have learned attention to detail, the discipline of hard work and a passion for excellence.

When I eat lunch with Linfield students, I invariably hear stories about Anne Kruchten, Rob Gardner, Carol Gallagher and many other Linfield faculty and staff. I learn what we do well, and I learn what we could do better. But my lunches in Dillin Hall do more than provide me with inside information, they also inspire me to do my work and to find more support for the college. I am not certain that we have the finest young people in the world at Linfield, but it sure feels that way. Dillin's food gives me physical sustenance; Dillin's students fill me with inspiration and joy. ■

– Thomas L. Hellie
President

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