

Summer 2008

Dolan Shares Wit, Wisdom

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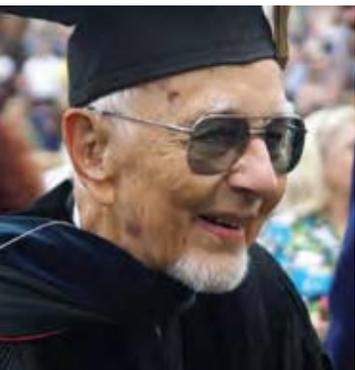
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Recommended Citation

Mileham, Mardi (2008) "Dolan Shares Wit, Wisdom," *Linfield Magazine*: Vol. 5 : No. 1 , Article 18.
Available at: https://digitalcommons.linfield.edu/linfield_magazine/vol5/iss1/18

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Dolan shares wit, wisdom



At 99, Winthrop Dolan may have slowed down a little, but he's as sharp, witty and wise as when he was a math professor at Linfield College.

Dolan received a standing ovation after he charmed, entertained and challenged the nearly 500 members of the class of 2008 during his commencement address on June 1.

Dolan quipped that when Linfield President Thomas L. Hellie first contacted him about speaking at commencement, Dolan didn't have

his hearing aids on and thought the president wanted him to spell sesquicentennial.

"I've been uneasy about spelling since the fourth grade when a girl named Marjorie Smith beat me in the finals of the spelling bee," he said with a pokerface. "You can tell how traumatic it was because I can still remember the details after 90 years.

"(Dr. Hellie) said, at commencement we are calling attention to the college's relics and antiques and we thought it would be appropriate to have you join us," Dolan said to peals of laughter. "And of course he is right. I am an antique. I've been around the college for about 40 percent of those 150 years. So here I am and you have to make the best of it."

Dolan, professor emeritus of math who also served as dean, twice as interim president, and on the board of trustees, shared some of his own experiences on how the world has changed dramatically during his lifetime, changes including advances in health care, transportation and technology.

Raised during an era when many rural areas did not have indoor plumbing, central heat, a telephone or electricity, Dolan said they had never heard of radio, much less television, supermarkets, heart surgery or air travel. They could not envision computers, cell phones, digital cameras or antibiotics.

The backdrop was World War I, the first of six major wars Dolan has seen in his lifetime.

"I wonder if, and I hope that, your generation can do better with finding a way out of that cycle. Do you think you can?" he asked. The response was a round of applause from graduates.

After joining the Linfield faculty in 1948, he used one of the first IBM computers installed in Portland. In 30 minutes it calculated tables that would have taken him months to complete on a calculator, but today can be done in seconds on a laptop computer.

"I think that in your lifetime, you will see equally astonishing advances that we can hardly imagine today and that they will come at an ever faster speed," he told the graduates.

"But will the basic problems of our society be any closer to a solution?" he asked. Problems such as economic booms and busts, lack of a national health program, budget deficit and national debt, disappearing natural resources, global warming and persistent wars need to be addressed.

"You must be involved in the effort to get a handle on such matters and on the equally great problem of spreading the so-called advances of our society to the less favored parts of the world," he added, encouraging graduates to take advantage of their experiences traveling and studying abroad and to work in the Peace Corps or through outreach programs of their churches.

He told of visiting a math classroom in the Congo shortly after he retired and spending some time with students.

When he left, he thought, "Wow, if I had been exposed to this situation when I was 23 instead of 68, this is where I might have been teaching."

His final thought?

"Just for the improvement of life, look or listen for something beautiful each day, perhaps a flowering tree or a meadowlark's song," he said. "Let it sink in for a moment before you go on your way."

— *Mardi Mileham*

