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A View from Melrose

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Preparing students for change

When President Leonard Riley spoke at the 50th anniversary of Linfield College in 1908, we were still known as McMinnville College, and our future was precarious. Thanks to him, and to our faculty, staff, friends, students and alumni, we survived and began to prosper.

In 1958, at age 100, we were Linfield College, with many new buildings, a national reputation in the sciences, and two consecutive winning seasons in football. The next two decades would see dramatic – and sometimes painful – change at Linfield College. But we endured and ultimately flourished.

And now, at 150, Linfield is thriving and still growing. In some respects we are the same Linfield: a welcoming, egalitarian college that serves students from all economic classes. A college that emphasizes the liberal arts. A college with a demonstrated commitment to excellence in scholarship and in the classroom. A college that blends the theoretical with the practical. A college that is at once inspirational and pragmatic.

But our college has changed substantially in the last 50 years. We've established a Portland Campus and a Division of Continuing Education. We've doubled the size of our McMinnville Campus. More than 50 percent of our students study in foreign countries, and we are successfully competing with the best liberal arts colleges in the United States. And while our football winning streak now extends 52 seasons, our most recent national sports championship was won, just last year, by a softball team of Linfield women.

Much has changed here. But change is the watchword for the future of American higher education, and for the future of Linfield College. Politics, society, business and science – all are spinning faster in a global vortex. Thanks to information technology, communication and travel, we are living in a vast web of cultural exchanges and connections.

We must prepare our students for change, to learn how to learn from experience, to gain cultural sensitivity and understanding, to become citizens of the world, to be flexible and adaptable rather than rigid and unchanging.

On Jan. 8 our beloved Old Oak fell. It had stood here long before there was a college, but it was an emblem with which we identified. Enormous, strong and dramatic, it sheltered us from the sun and rain. But it was old and rigid. No longer able to bend in the wind, its roots weakened, it became vulnerable, and it fell.

In the coming months, we will continue to discuss and mourn the Old Oak. But we will also talk about the future of our many young trees – and of our many young students. Our task must be to bend in the swirling winds without yielding our place or identity. To harness the power of the winds rather than be damaged by them. To remain true to our heritage while facing the inevitability of change.

We will remain egalitarian, excellent, pragmatic and inspired. We will honor and encourage the search for truth. We will connect learning, life, and community. And we will prepare young, flexible, strong, dynamic students who are ready to engage the world in their commitment to justice and their quest to serve humanity. But most importantly, our students will be going forth into the world, doing well and doing good, remembering that the Old Oak – and Linfield – give us courage and keep us steadfast on our way.

– Thomas L. Hellie

(Editor's note: For the complete text of Dr. Hellie's sesquicentennial address, please go to:

<http://www.linfield.edu/president/150.php>



President Thomas L. Hellie, left; Glenna Kruger '68, chair of the Board of Trustees; and Win Dolan, professor emeritus of mathematics who served as acting president twice, rode in a mule-drawn surrey owned and driven by Wayne Beckwith from the First Baptist Church to campus during the sesquicentennial celebration on Jan. 30.