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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 a demonstrated commitment to excellence in scholarship and in the classroom. A college with a growing sports program, two consecutive winning seasons in football. In some respects we are the same Linfield: a college that is at once inspirational and pragmatic. A college that blends the theoretical with the practical. A college that emphasizes the development 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.

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.

As we celebrate, so do we mourn. Just three weeks before celebrating the 150th anniversary of the chartering of the Baptist College at McMinnville, the Old Oak crashed to the ground. Long a symbol of Linfield College, it loomed as though we have lost an old friend. On the cover and inside is a tribute to this silent guardian. We also continue our journey through Linfield’s history, as Marvin Henberg looks at how the educational curriculum has changed over 150 years. This issue also features one of Linfield’s senior professors, whose passion for his subject has taken him around the world. We cover two students, one a former Army Ranger, critically injured in Afghanistan, and another whose talent for talking has led to a major in communication arts. Join us as we continue our journey through Linfield’s rich past and as we plan and prepare for a vibrant future.

—Mardi Mileham

On the cover: Old Oak Fallen, © Lex Runciman, professor of English (Juan Calvillo photo)