

NOTRE DAME COLLEGE:
Its Life, Its Mission, Its Impact



HOLY CROSS HISTORY
CONFERENCE

Saturday June 11, 2005

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NOTRE DAME COLLEGE

Its Life, Its Mission, Its Impact

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Introduction

Presidents

1950-1957	Sister Claude, CSC, M.A.
1957-1959	Sister Louise Parent, CSC, Ph.D. (Interim)
1959-1967	Sister Laure Kegresse, CSC, Ph.D.
1967-1985	Sister Jeannette Vezeau, CSC, Ph.D.
1985-1999	Sister Carol J. Descoteaux, CSC, Ph.D.
1999-2000	Sylvio Dupuis, OD (Interim)
2000-2002	Father Anthony J. DeConciliis, CSC, Ph.D.
2002-2004	Alicia A. Finn, Ph.D. (Interim)

Life at Notre Dame

Professional Orientation

Student Life and Student Congress

Mission of the College

Mission Statement

Impact of the College

On the Student Body
On the Faculty
On the City of Manchester
On the State of New Hampshire
On Society in general

Conclusion

PRESENTATION

As I was getting ready to work on this paper, I was given a copy of the Fall 2004 Issue of **"Signs of Hope"**— a publication coming from King's College in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania. I was particularly struck by the analogy that existed between the Mission Statement of Notre Dame College and of King's College.

The Mission Statement for Notre Dame College reads as follows:

"Notre Dame College was founded in 1950 by the Sisters of Holy Cross to meet the need for professional and career training in conjunction with a liberal arts education. The Mission embodies education of the whole person, mind, heart, body and spirit. It is inextricably linked to the mission of the Sisters of Holy Cross, and the educational pedagogy of the Reverend Basile Moreau, CSC, who founded the Congregation in France, in 1841. Consistent with the strong tradition of Catholic social ethics, Community Service Learning is viewed as an essential component of a Notre Dame College education..."

The Mission Statement of King's College reads as follows:

"King's College was founded in 1946 by the Congregation of Holy Cross...in order to provide students with a broad-based liberal education in the Catholic tradition and to offer intellectual, moral and spiritual preparation for satisfying and purposeful lives. Holy Cross sponsorship and the Catholic tradition are important components of King's educational experience." The College was founded to offer Catholic, Higher Education to "the sons of coal miners," especially those from immigrant, ethnic groups who faced discrimination on several fronts.

Notre Dame College was established to favor "young women" whose parents worked in the textile mills, especially young women of Franco-American families who had emigrated from Canada in the late nineteenth century. In reading and reflecting on these Mission Statements, it became evident that their purpose paralleled one another and made evident the common vision of Holy Cross in meeting the needs of the Church, of students and of society in general. These two Institutions founded only four years apart give form to the spirit and the mission of Father Moreau and are the lived experience of all Holy Cross Foundations.

NOTRE DAME COLLEGE AND ITS PRESIDENTS:

The first President to serve was **Sister Mary Claude, CSC**, who held a dual position as Principal at the flourishing Saint George High School in Manchester, N.H. The focus of Sister Claude's role was the important task of establishing the Academic program for the first class of fifteen students. Sister Laure Kegresse, CSC, who bore the title of Dean and Registrar, was given the task of guiding the college on its course in those adventurous first years. Sister Mary Claude, an English teacher by profession and a poet, remained Principal of the High School while serving as President of Notre Dame. She presided over the meetings of the Board of Trustees, which at that time, was composed solely of the Central Administration of the Sisters of Holy Cross in Canada. She also placed her stamp of approval on all the developments that occurred in those crucial years of the foundation. As the college grew, and as her health was failing (loss of her sight was her cross to bear), Sister Claude stepped down from the position of President. She is remembered for her kindness, her gentleness, and her love of Holy Cross.

Without fanfare, the College had opened its doors in September of 1950 to fifteen full-time and thirty part-time students, the latter mostly religious who pursued their degrees attending Saturday courses and Summer Sessions. Six religious formed the personnel of the newly established Institution. They were: Sister Cecilia (Aurea Bellerose), Music; Sister Celine-Esther (Louise Parent), History; Sister Edmond of York (Agnes Lanier), Business; Sister Francis of the Sacred Heart (Juliette LeBlanc), Biology; Sister Gertrude of Jesus (Laurette Bujold), dietitian; and Sister Nerijs (Annette Methot), Household Management. Part-time faculty were hired. A priest, Father Wilfrid Chartier, gave the courses in Theology and Mrs. Frank Wageman was hired to teach Physical Education.

The College received its first resident chaplain in the Fall of 1959. Father George Murray was named by Bishop Brady to serve in this capacity. His residency at the College was complemented by his appointment as Diocesan Superintendent of Schools for the Manchester Diocese of New Hampshire.

The Chandler Estate, located in the north end of the city of Manchester, was purchased by the Congregation to serve as the first building of the College. It included a large heated carriage-building which at one time had housed a coachman on the second story, and which contained two stalls for horses on the first floor. Work began immediately on the renovation of this carriage house to provide classrooms, a science lab, a library and an "auditorium" complete

with stage and wings. Ingenuity, skill and pride in the workmanship of the contractor resulted in a functional and sturdy building which served as the main academic quarters until 1965. It was known as St. Joseph Hall.

While **Sister Laure Kegresse** was officially named President only in 1959, its direction had rested in her hands from the start. During her Presidency, six houses in the area were purchased and the highlight of her Presidency was the construction of Holy Cross Hall. Several houses served as dormitories for resident students, while Holy Cross Hall became the center of academic activities and the library was moved to Rosary House. Acquisition of neighboring private homes and the construction of Holy Cross Hall were not done too soon as the following anecdote proves. The crowded rooms, hallways and auditorium were always a concern and summoning a meeting of the entire student body was a nightmare. What if the fire department chose that day for inspection? Well, lo and behold, the fire department showed during an assembly. "What is the capacity allowed for this room?" the Dean, Sister Celine- Esther was asked. "Eighty- five" she replied. "How many persons are here now?" he pursued... "One hundred and eighty-five," was the answer. And the Sister was quick to add: "That is why we are building a new facility." Happily, construction was on its way. God walks before us.

The new building was ready for occupancy in September of 1965. Built in an L-shaped form, one wing was laid out for classrooms and science labs. The other wing provided facilities for an auditorium-gymnasium, a Music Department, the kitchen and the cafeteria.

For any college President, and especially for a founder of a new College, accreditation by the Regional Association of Colleges, in the case of Notre Dame College, the New England Association of Schools and Colleges, is a priority goal. Accreditation testifies to the academic strength and financial viability of an institution. The words "accredited college" are the magic doors that open, for an institution, the opportunity to enjoy academic, social, and economic advantages that promote its further development.

Accreditation was not to be granted under Sister Laure's Presidency. For seventeen years, she had remained at the helm of Notre Dame College, as Dean and as President. Her task had been to weather the initial doubts, hardships and agonizing decisions inherent to founding a college. Under her vigorous leadership, the college grew from fifteen students to 240 full-time students, from the Chandler house to nine buildings including the multi-purpose Holy Cross Hall, and from eight faculty members to thirty-six in 1967. Sister Laure carried the burden of the

beginnings with faith, with courage, and with ingenuity. The College owed this courageous woman a major debt of gratitude.

In the summer of 1967 **Sister Jeannette Vezeau, CSC**, better known as JV, was appointed President of the college by the Superior General of the Congregation, Sister Marguerite Galipeau, CSC. The newly-named President had considerable administrative experience as superior of a local religious house, as principal of a High School, as Supervisor of Studies for the Holy Cross religious of the New England Province and as a member of the Provincial Council.

A business woman by profession, holding a Doctorate in Business Administration, Sister Jeannette's first concern was to meet with the members of the General Council in Montreal, in order to clarify the nature and scope of her powers in the governance of the College. Lack of familiarity with the administration of American colleges and distance itself rendered the effectiveness of the Board of Trustees dubious. Understanding her position, they were willing to transfer their function as a Board of Trustees to persons more knowledgeable of the American Educational System. The religious Community retained its ownership of the physical assets of Notre Dame College and thus became known as the Corporation of the Sisters of Holy Cross. A new Board of Trustees was named and the By-laws of this new Board were adopted at the May meeting of 1969.

Sister Jeannette's first years saw many organizational changes in the administrative pattern. There was a need for an Administrative Assistant to the President whose role it would be to serve as a link between Notre Dame College and the New Hampshire College and University Council, and to assess the personnel needs of the College and to aid in the development plans.

The influx of resident students in the Fall of 1968 not only called for additional housing to accommodate them, but also resulted in the assessment of the uses being made of the existing buildings. The number of residents was mounting, as the religious and lay faculty also increased. New houses were purchased to serve as dorms for the students and as homes for the religious. As the college was growing, so was the concern of neighbors who, at times, made it difficult to obtain zoning for these new dorms. These neighbors feared depreciation of their property because of the presence of so many resident students. Although the members of the Board of Trustees proved most helpful in dealing with the issue, they were unsuccessful in breaking down the resistance of this area opposition. Friendly relations, however, were never completely

severed with our neighbors. In the midst of all this, the College expanded and became an Institution of Higher Education, in later years ranking as one of the best in New England.

When Sister Jeannette took office, regional accreditation was still the College's major academic goal. It was a happy moment when, in December of 1970 the college received institutional membership and accreditation from the New England Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools for a period of ten years. In its twentieth year, the College had come of age in the academic world!

Sister Jeannette's enlightened leadership encouraged initiative and creativity. The participation of faculty and students in academic policy and decision-making gave, to the intellectual life of the College, its flexibility and its ability to respond to changing educational needs. Her managerial leadership was amply demonstrated by the fact that, with little endowment income, annual tuition in 1975 was still less than \$2000. This grand lady had encouraged and supported academic proposals that she recognized as likely destined to add to the quality of education at Notre Dame. An intensive study of the curriculum, as part of a self-study undertaken by the College in 1968-69, resulted in major changes in curriculum structure and in the modification of programs.

"Division heads," in the Humanities, Natural Sciences and Social Sciences, replaced the "Department chairpersons." A three-year experimental *humanities program* was inaugurated in the Fall of 1969. A *teacher-training* program was re-organized, placing more emphasis on observation and clinical experience. A program leading to a major in *commercial art* was initiated, as well as a two-year program leading to an Associate in Arts in the *secretarial sciences*.

Although, at this time, Notre Dame had no intention of becoming a co-ed college, the exchange program existing among Consortium colleges opened the doors of admission to young men for specialized programs offered on campus. The areas of music and art were the first to attract male students.

For seventeen years, Sister Jeannette Vezeau served Notre Dame as its President, as its leader Par Excellence, as its Soul and Heart, dedicating every moment of her time to the betterment of faculty, of students, of staff, of maintenance – a token of her love for all who had the pleasure of knowing her. In 1985, Sister Jeannette resigned from her post, leaving a legacy of great achievement and of dedication to a cause that was dear to her heart – that of education.

"Trust in the Mission During Times of Change" was the theme of the College Convocation for the Fall Semester in 1985.

A new President came to the fore: **a woman of vision, a woman of mission, a woman of courage, Sr. Carol Descoteaux, CSC.** She assumed the responsibility of leadership in June 1985. At 37 years old, that was quite a task to accept – but that she did, with a prophetic dimension. Her inauguration was celebrated on October 20, the culmination of an extraordinary Parents Weekend. It was the first of its kind at the College. At the same time, this seminal event provided an opportunity to mark the 35th anniversary of the College's founding. The speaker at the inauguration was Dr. Elinor Ford, President of William H. Sanders, Inc., a publisher of Catholic teaching materials. In her speech, Dr. Ford described the ability of Sister Carol as follows:

"Notre Dame College has chosen a new leader well because Sister Carol's doctoral work was rooted not just in academia – anyone can get a Doctorate in academia – but because Sister Carol's doctoral work images the very purpose for which Notre Dame was founded. It images the very reason why all of us are here today, a reason that is revealed in today's gospel that says... 'we come not to be served but to serve.' Indeed, Notre Dame has chosen well."

In her inaugural address, Sister Carol stressed the importance of the liberal arts complemented by career-related programs. She envisioned new developments that included the creation of a counseling and development center, an early childhood center, a new chapel and a cultural arts center.

A woman of compassion, Sister Carol was always there to sympathize with members of the College Community when sorrow would strike. Her kindness, her generosity came to the fore when students were in need of any help. Financial Aid was well established and students received benefits to help them attain a college education. Regular diocesan salaries of \$10,000 a year were provided to religious faculty whose work at the time was considered as contributed services. With time, salaries were raised to be commensurate to those of the lay faculty. The College was in need of transformation. This required bold decision-making, and the courage, energy, strong commitment and audacity personified in Basile Moreau. Financial constraints had forced the College to declare financial exigency in early 1986. Programs were re-vitalized, faculty status was re-adjusted, and some degree programs were eliminated.

The mid-1980's presented both challenge and opportunity for Notre Dame College. The new leadership team was undaunted in its conviction that Notre Dame College played a unique role in the State of New Hampshire., They firmly believed the mission, to serve young people of low and average economic means, was critically important in order to provide students with the opportunity to enroll in a school of higher education. The College community rallied around this effort. There were difficult moments but the future growth of Notre Dame College was to emerge from this endeavor. Sister Carol herself agonized at times, but her determination to make Notre Dame a special place for students and all those involved, made the sacrifices worthwhile. From then on, this small college known as Notre Dame College was looking to a bright future.

When debate on campus came around the issue of including young men as full time students, Sister Carol called the College community together to discuss the question of whether or not, Notre Dame should change its status from primarily a women's college to a fully co-educational institution. That meeting, held in February of 1986, marked the first time in the College's history that students, alumni, faculty and administration participated in an open forum to express their concerns about or support a major decision that would effect all. After all sides of the question were explored, a final vote was taken. When the tally was completed, there were 142 votes in favor of the change and only 2 against. In turn, the Board of Trustees and the Corporation of the Sisters of Holy Cross voted to change the status of Notre Dame College to fully co-educational. Other changes that came about during the Presidency of Sister Carol:

- The academic area was strengthened with a newly integrated inter-disciplinary core curriculum re-configured into Major Areas, viz.: Humanities, Education, and Sciences (General and Natural).
- A Dean for each division replaced the chairpersons of the departments.
- A "writing across the curriculum" program was established.
- The Campus Ministry program was expanded to include a strong community service component. This was long before "Community Service Learning" became part of the national agenda.
- New programs came into place such as the communications major that prepared students for media service.
- The establishment of the counseling center and the student development office proved to be proficient and effective for the students.

- Other new Programs came into existence in the 1990's, with the introduction of the physical therapy and physician's assistant programs.
- Enrollment rose from approximately 740 in 1985 to its highest enrollment of about 1350.
- The Student Development (student affairs) division was established, providing an integrated approach to student life and comprised of the Counseling & Development Center, Career Office, Campus Ministry, Residential Life, Student Activities and the Student Center.
- An athletics program, which was introduced in 1990, further enhanced student life.
- In the Graduate Division, the Theology Department reached a significant milestone with the addition of the only Master's Degree in the State of New Hampshire. This program was established in response to the need of the Church to provide an educational program for Deacons.

After a trip to Israel, where the Jewish and Christian Communities came together, the College established a "Shalom Center" to promote greater understanding between Christians and Jews.

With the vision of Father Moreau, the College community under the leadership of Sister Carol built a gem of a College, oft-cited by national consultants to Notre Dame and area leaders as the "jewel in the crown" of Higher Education in Manchester and New England. With her vision fully aligned with the vision of Father Moreau and with her love of Holy Cross, Sister Carol continued to polish this gem. It developed into an institution where faculty, students, staff and administrators worked hand in hand, and where Notre Dame became a learning community where everyone could be happy and could build friendships that would last for a lifetime.

Sister Carol also received many awards such as being named the **Alum of the Year** from each of her Alma Maters, Notre Dame College, Boston College and the University of Notre Dame. She also was named **Citizen of the Year** for her involvement in Civic Affairs in the City of Manchester and for her dedication to the cause of Education. This is just to name a few.

In 1999, after giving to the College some of the best years of her life, Sister Carol felt that it was time to step down and to face other challenges in this world of ours.

Invited to become the Vice President for Mission at Saint Joseph's Hospital in Nashua, New Hampshire, she accepted and again brought there all her expertise to addressing the needs of the sick and especially helping the poor. Endowed with an extraordinary sense of Mission and a true love for Father Moreau, she now serves as the Animator for our Region as well as Director of Mission and Ministry.

To name a new President was not an easy task. A Committee was established for the search. The Charter of the College stated that the President had to come from one of the Holy Cross Communities...

After a year of intense search, **Father Anthony DeConciliis, CSC** accepted to come to Notre Dame College, arriving on July 1, 2000 and thus becoming the fifth President of this Institution. Having been Vice President for Academic Affairs and Academic Dean at Washington Theological Union in Washington, D.C., Father Anthony brought not only considerable experience in Higher Education but also an understanding of the Holy Cross Mission.

At his first meeting with Faculty and Staff, Father Anthony stated:

"I feel privileged to join this Notre Dame College Community and the larger New Hampshire Community. I wholeheartedly endorse the Mission of this Institution."

As the College prepared to celebrate its 50th anniversary with various events, trips and festivities, Father Anthony was entering a momentous time in its history, recognizing that while much had been accomplished in the past years, much still needed to be done to "cross the wide waters." As Leo Tolstoy reminds us in *War and Peace*, understanding history in the light of events is a complex, if not impossible task that is ultimately rooted in faith.

"There is, and can be, no cause of an historical event except the one cause of all causes. But there are laws directing events, and while some of these laws are known to us, there are others we cannot comprehend. The discovery of these laws is only possible when we have quite abandoned the attempt to find the cause in the will of some one person, just as the discovery of the laws of the motion of the planets was possible only when we abandoned the conception of the fixity of the earth."

Although the closing of Notre Dame College occurred a short eighteen months after Father DeConciliis's arrival, he had nothing to do with it. As a matter of fact, he had high hopes that the College would survive, but when the chaos plagued our country on 9/11, it proved to be

fatal for Notre Dame College. Many of our benefactors suffered great losses and the help needed to build our dreams further was stifled. It was the decision of the Board of Trustees – on November 28, 2001 -- to close Notre Dame College. On November 29, 2001, the College community was advised that the closing was imminent and nothing else could be done. This came to all, Administration, Faculty, Students and Staff, as a shock because there had been no warning whatsoever.

Religious Faculty saw this as an opportunity to foster our mission in other ministries, Lay Faculty questioned the decision but understood the situation and students were outstanding in their efforts to make this an opportunity to face the disappointment with courage and in faith. Everyone seized the opportunity to unite and to re-live the terrific experience of having been a member of this special community living. During this time of deep loss, the Mission of Notre Dame College showed its face and was vibrant with purpose.

When we are called to mission somewhere, we are not always aware of the way we touch the lives of those confided to our care. Here, I would like to share the thoughts of the graduating class of 2001. This is how they expressed their feelings in the dedication of their Yearbook – I quote:

“The Class of 2001 dedicates their yearbook to those whose lights have shown for fifty years here at Notre Dame College, the Sisters of Holy Cross. They had the vision to begin this Institution and the innovation to raise funds to build Holy Cross by the formation of the “100 Angels of Song” who sang internationally and recorded four records. They remind us that not all which is important is of this world and in their daily lives exemplify the values noted in our college song – wisdom, honor, friendship, care, knowledge, faith and love. As we graduate, memories of a few of the Sisters of Holy Cross currently serving at our school include: the seemingly kinetic energy of Sister Frances as she made sure we kept our advisor meetings and went to class; Sr. Cecile’s enthusiasm for music, people, and life in general; the patience of Sr. Irene Laberge in SASC, who managed to survive all of the frustrated students during registration; and the gentle smile and offers of prayers from Sr. Jeannette if we were wandering the halls late at night looking worried. Those of us on the Senate thank Sr. Pauline for her proverbial calmness amid our storms.

These and all the other Sisters present and past at Notre Dame College are owed and are given our deepest thanks. We appreciate the dedication you have shown Notre Dame and its students and will do our best to let our lights shine bright as we continue onward, helping others not for our own glory, but for theirs and God’s – just as you have done in helping us...”

Father DeConciliis was scheduled to leave at the end of November, 2002. There was still a great deal to do to bring closure to the College – the selling of remaining properties, the selling of equipment, the transfer of all records to the State of New Hampshire, and the graduation of the remaining 400+ students under transfer agreements and seeking a Notre Dame College degree.... It was not an easy task to undertake.

From the heart of the living Mission of Notre Dame College there beat the heart of special people who are dedicated and who have given the best of themselves, understanding the ramifications and always ready to say “yes” to whatever is. Qualities of leadership and dedication to the Mission of Notre Dame were visibly present in a very special lady who had served the College for sixteen years – **Dr. Alicia Finn.**

Dr. Finn was well known within the Congregations of Holy Cross as she has been working for and with Holy Cross for over twenty-five years at the University of Notre Dame, on the Board of Trustees at Holy Cross College and for the last sixteen at Notre Dame College. She assumed the role of President and, for over two years, she saw to every detail that the closing of a college entails. Although this was a difficult task to accomplish, Alicia did it with dignity, integrity and sensitivity. Founder of the Counseling and Development Center, she had also served as Vice President for Student Development. Alicia stood as a beacon of light to the students she advised or counseled. As a colleague, she was highly respected by all those who knew her well. Our hearts and our love are with her because of the woman that she is.

Despite the closing Notre Dame College, guided by the values of the Congregation of the Sisters of Holy Cross, had for fifty-two years, let its light shine in Manchester, throughout the State of New Hampshire, and beyond with a generous zeal. Ultimately, its legacy and record are clear; its contributions to the spiritual, intellectual, and physical well-being of the community are unmistakable and indelible.

Thanks to its dedicated people, Notre Dame College fulfilled its mission and lived its charism, perhaps best expressed in an old Chinese proverb, “Be moved, be carried, be taken willingly by the primal urge. It is infallible. From the beginning, it has been practicing for now... **”Physical space will close, but the spirit of Notre Dame never will...** This was the title of an article that appeared in the Union Leader newspaper when it was announced that Notre Dame was closing. It was written by a 1998 graduate and it expresses so well the impact Notre Dame

had on the Manchester Community as well as the State of New Hampshire and on society in general. I would like to share it with you as the conclusion to this presentation.

I quote:

"In the Spring of 1998, I took home with me a degree from an institution that fostered knowledge and growth that I often still speak of with friends and colleagues. My college experience was extraordinary. I relished the small classes where, as one of only a handful of English majors, I learned and developed an appreciation for American Literature, for Greek theater, for Shakespeare and Chaucer. I grew from the experience of being exposed to writings of the oppressed, of religions of the world, women in American history, and the need for social change. I learned the art of teaching and how one's educational experience is threefold, encompassing mind, body and spirit. In the Spring of 1998, I graduated from Notre Dame College – a community of learners and teachers unlike any other I have encountered since.

The closing of Notre Dame College is an indescribable loss, a death of sorts, for Notre Dame College gives so much to its students and is such a miraculous place that it seems incomprehensible that the institution will be no more come the Spring. Yet, in feeling this sense of grief, I am reminded of the gifts that only Notre Dame could give; gifts that are intangible and unable to die – and that will remain as a lasting legacy for decades to come.

Notre Dame graduates students who have shared a sense of purpose – a common bond, an understanding that only the educated are truly free. Notre Dame Alumni embody this truth and bring Notre Dame's lessons to our homes, our communities, our families and our places of work.

Today is a time of great shock and sadness for the Notre Dame community: for the faculty who are perhaps the most student-centered teachers I have ever known, for the committed and loyal staff who help students through the transition to college as freshmen to the transition to professionals as seniors. Yet, in this sadness, the Notre Dame community still shares that common bond that only the educated are truly free and that education is threefold: mind, body and spirit.

As a Notre Dame alumnus who truly loves the College, my sincerest gratitude is extended to the faculty who taught with such passion and expertise, patience and fortitude. I am grateful to them for their gifts of knowledge and feel blessed to have had such teachers. My heart goes out to the loyal and dedicated staff, the Sisters who helped to make Notre Dame a community of learners and who helped students to grow.

Looking beyond the finances, beyond the physical plant, beyond the slipping enrollments, Notre Dame will not ever close. Those who have come into its light will always carry on its distinct and positive mission of liberal education, encompassing mind, body and spirit – that spirit cannot ever die..."

Kenneth T. Ferreira, Jr., a 1998 graduate of Notre Dame, is a resident of Londonderry and is assistant director of Student Financial Services at Harvard University's School of Public Health in Boston.

I find myself blessed to have been a part of this Institution as a professor for 40 years...and with Students, Faculty, Administration and Staff, I proudly say:

Lux Vestra Luceat!

SOURCES OF INFORMATION

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Interviews – Carol J. Descoteaux, CSC, PhD.

Anthony J. DeConciliis, CSC, PhD.

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Pictures and Power Point - Suzanne A. Payette, CSC