

If you had walked into Marshall School via the lobby outside this auditorium anytime in the past few weeks, you would have come upon a most unusual sight. The first thing to catch your eye might have been the yellow tape marking off the center area, the same kind of yellow caution tape that reminds you to watch your step when walking near a construction site. Or perhaps your eye might have zeroed in on three white-coated young women wielding small tools and sometimes wearing facemasks. Perhaps then your eyes might have lifted to the mosaic that has graced the lobby of this Fregeau Auditorium since Benedictine Sr. Christopher Pavlich enlisted the support of students in the creation of her mosaic that ultimately has welcomed every visitor to this building since 1965.

Today might not be the best day you could choose to study the mosaic quietly, but, indeed, it is worth studying. The small tiles, ordered from Italy and contributed to by the student councils of the school's early years in this building, depict a scene that was intended to remind students of the beauty of their northland home, while inspiring them to the part they ultimately could play in the wider world. Sr. Pavlich said of its meaning *I would like to rescue students from being overwhelmed by their small place in an immense universe. They should know that their place in this school, in Duluth, in the United States, in the world, at this moment, is a significant one. They have a contribution to make; however small, it is important. It will touch all facets of Duluth's life and beyond.*

Something about the mosaic and its message, to say nothing of its 40 years of disrepair, captured the imagination of seniors Annie Deutsch, Amanda McLean, and Vicky Wanta. Like their classmates, these graduating seniors were searching for a meaningful senior project to occupy their final two weeks of school. I am proud that Marshall School recently embraced the innovative idea of guiding its almost-graduates to a senior project outside of the classroom that enables them to pursue a passion, create a work of art, study deeply something not yet learned, or contribute time to a service project. Seniors are ready for this independence from our watchful eyes, and they start down new paths at the very time when cutting new paths seems like the right thing to do.

This renovation project, however, touched something in me and in many who observed them at work. A project like this closes the circle between alumni 40 years ago and students today. We stand for a moment in the same shoes as those who opened this building to Hilltoppers for the first time in 1962. We recognize that while the times are different, the instincts of 18 year-olds have some similarities. I have always believed that our current Hilltoppers must remember that they weren't the first to stand in these halls and they won't be the last. They inherited a strong legacy and they must pass it on in even better condition.

A mosaic does something else, however. As a metaphor for community, mosaics remind us how the small tile that represents each of us fits into a much greater expanse. One small piece of glass is important for its sheen, its deep color, and its unique shape, just as each of you, seniors, is unique. But put together many of those tiles and there is fluidity and larger meaning.

So, too, is it with this class of 2006. What are the components that made up your years at Marshall? What have been your dreams, your disappointments, your accomplishments? How do all those pieces fit into the mural of your experience as Marshall Hilltoppers? Let me play back for you a few:

- You told me when you were eighth graders when we had breakfast together on your last day of school that you would never forget your Widji experience or Old Fort William, so there must be some tiles in the mosaic for those outdoor components of your education, including your Boundary Waters trip in ninth grade and your Manitowish leadership experience this year.
- There must be some tiles for our place in the state of Minnesota because you told me as seniors that the school's celebrations for statewide competitions this year were central to your senior year experience—fan busses to St. Paul for the boys' hockey tournament and rousing sendoffs for Mock Trial and Knowledge Bowl. You like the fact that you could experience pride about girls' danceline and golf, about boys' basketball and tennis, about math league—all putting this small school on the map in state competitions, especially notable considering our match against much larger student populations in other schools.
- The strong adjectives you used to describe the quality of your teachers ensures a section in the mosaic for them, too. You were very clear in your assessment. Caring, patient, creative—that was what you liked best about your middle school teachers. As seniors, you appreciated the faculty's charismatic tendencies; you called them enthralling, passionate, and driven to teach well.
- So many of your senior projects had an artistic component to them that we must carve out space in the mosaic for your experiences in the arts. You were the first class, at least as far back as anyone can remember, that traveled together for choir and band performances far outside of Duluth. You put on concerts to feed the hungry. You will be the last group to sit on porous seats in this auditorium or hold onto the lighting board with a hope and a prayer. And I hope you will be the first group back to enjoy the arts in a much-renovated auditorium next year.
- Somewhere on that mosaic there must be a place to recognize that you were the first class to launch a senior speech program, an initiative that enabled us to talk about issues and to get to know each other better. Sixteen of you volunteered to stand alone at the podium and address your peers in the audience about something deeply important to you. Others will do it too someday, but we will always know that you were the first.

There are so many more tiles that represent you in the Hilltopper mosaic of this community.

You have been students first and foremost, because no matter what else we put before you, the first mission of this school is to develop strong academic habits. The colleges that accepted you and that offered you such generous scholarships recognize that, as do we. But you also are athletes, artists, musicians, historians and environmentalists. You are writers, scientists, mathematicians, linguists and philosophers. Above all, know this--there is a tile in the mosaic for each of you. *And there always will be.*

Come back soon and come back often, but for now, god-speed.