

**CONVOCATION**  
**The Lawrenceville School**  
**September 5, 2010**  
***“O, Where Will Be Old Lawrenceville”***  
**Elizabeth A. Duffy H’43, Head Master**

Welcome to Convocation. We gather together this evening to mark the beginning of the 201<sup>st</sup> school year at Lawrenceville. At last year’s Convocation, in honor of our Bicentennial, I looked back on the first 200 years of the School’s history. This evening, I want to look forward, both to the coming year and to the future.

“O, where will be old Lawrenceville,  
When a hundred years have rolled?”

That was the refrain from a popular campus song during the School’s Centennial in 1910. As we complete the celebration of our Bicentennial and begin our third century, it seems a valuable question to pose again, even if it is impossible to answer with any certainty. Though I don’t have a crystal ball, I strongly suspect that 100 years from now three aspects of Lawrenceville will remain signature features of the School – the House system, our collaborative Harkness approach to teaching and learning, and the strong relationships between faculty and students. Those features have already endured the test of time. Indeed, they have been cherished aspects of a Lawrenceville education for generations, and as returning students can attest, they remain central to the Lawrenceville experience today.

We’ll have lots of opportunities to celebrate House spirit this fall, beginning with the House Olympics tomorrow afternoon and including a House parade and the dedication of Carter House during the final Bicentennial celebration in October. I also look forward to the fierce but friendly rivalries between Houses in athletics, and to those House traditions that contribute positively to the School and the larger community – traditions such as Grisbee, Stephens’ gingerbread house holiday party with Eggerts Crossing Village, and Kennedy’s Rent-A-Friend. The House system was intended to provide a family-like atmosphere away from home. As you develop new House traditions, please honor the founders’ intentions by perpetuating and creating inclusive activities, like Woodhull’s Hot Karl’s HotDogs, that bring Housemates and Houses together and build community, not customs that disrupt or divide your House or the School.

This year not only marks the culmination of our Bicentennial, it also marks the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Harkness teaching at Lawrenceville. Harkness tables, which were first introduced to Lawrenceville classrooms in the fall of 1936, transformed teaching and learning here. Almost overnight, the traditional recitation method with a master lecturing from a raised platform to students sitting at desks lined up in rows was replaced by the much more interactive and collaborative setting you’re familiar with today, in which teachers and students sit side-by-side around a table or in small clusters of desks and together discuss Dickens to Darwin, Freud to the Four Noble Truths, Picasso to precalculus.

Good Harkness conversations require not only that you come to class prepared to contribute your ideas to the discussion, but also that you come to class genuinely interested in hearing what your classmates have to say and in really understanding what they mean, especially if they have a different perspective on a particular text or topic than you do. I know that you will all leave Lawrenceville with the confidence and skills to formulate and articulate your own opinions and ideas, but it's perhaps even more important that you learn here how to be empathetic listeners and strong question askers, for those latter dispositions and skills will serve you best in the globally interconnected world in which all of you will live and work and lead. One of my mentors once advised me, "Liz, always remember that there is wisdom in the resistance." By that, he meant that just as you hold your beliefs for good reasons, you should assume that others, even those with whom you strongly disagree, have sound rationales for their opinions. It's easy, and tempting, to ignore, dismiss or ridicule people with different points of view than your own, but it's those people you should listen to most closely because it's from them that you can often learn the most.

You'll have additional opportunities to practice your listening and question-asking skills when speakers visit campus. We're fortunate each year to have many distinguished visitors – and this year is no exception. So far, we have scheduled 2006 Nobel Peace Prize winner Muhammad Yunus, renowned organist Joan Lippincott, Pulitzer-Prize winning historian Annette Gordon-Reed, decorated Army colonel Jack Jacobs, CNN columnist and foreign correspondent Fareed Zakaria, and noted poet Naomi Nye. Given your varied backgrounds and perspectives, you may not all agree with the views of every speaker you hear in the KAC. Nevertheless, see if you can take away at least one insight, impression or idea from each of our accomplished visitors. Listening with open minds to what our visitors have to say and asking thoughtful questions that help us all understand better their perspectives and expertise will enrich your minds and lives.

Of course, another group of people from whom you'll learn a lot are the faculty. As returning students can corroborate, faculty members at Lawrenceville are not only passionate about their academic disciplines, but they also love teaching, coaching and working and living with you. So take the time to get to know them. Attend consultation. Talk to the faculty member on duty at check-in. Spend time with a coach before or after practice. Sit down with a teacher at dinner. Meet our families. Find out what our interests and hobbies are – they include foreign films, astronomy, golfing, cacti, vintage travel trailers, masters swimming, photography, birdhouses, travel, creative writing, fly fishing, magic, rowing, Rubik's cubes, bowling, yoga, gardening, country music and martial arts – and that's only a very partial list. As Nathan said last night, one of the aspects of Lawrenceville that alumni most fondly remember and value are their relationships with faculty. For some of you, your advisor will become a cherished mentor; for others it will be a housemaster, coach, classroom teacher or club advisor with whom you establish the strongest bond. It doesn't matter what role they play, seek out the faculty members to whom you relate well and get to know them, because those relationships will endure well beyond your time here.

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Two trends that have marked the first decade of this century and I predict will be important throughout the 21st century are globalization and sustainability. I hope that we as a School will continue to exert leadership in those arenas during our third century.

Last year as part of the Bicentennial Campaign we received a generous gift to endow our international travel program so that such experiences could be a central part of a Lawrenceville education. I encourage all of you to take advantage of that program by participating in a trip while you're here. So far this year, trips are planned to Russia, Peru, Ecuador, Turkey & Egypt, Brazil, India, China, Patagonia, France, Mexico, Arizona and South Africa. While a few are connected to particular classes or activities, many of the trips are open to anyone interested and financial aid is available for those who qualify.

But you don't have to even leave campus to learn more about the world. This year there are students from 32 states and 32 countries on campus, and we faculty and staff come from nearly as many places. We're all fortunate to have such global diversity within our midst, so I challenge each of you over the next month to reach out to someone from another region of the country or the world and to take the time to find out something about his or her culture that you didn't know. It took courage and a sense of adventure for all of you, especially those of you from overseas, to leave your local schools and attend Lawrenceville. I hope that you'll bring that sense of curiosity and discovery to your relationships here, because the magic of the Lawrenceville community is the reciprocity of interest that gets cultivated among you.

Earlier this week, I received an email from an alumnus from the Class of 1972, reflecting on his experience at Lawrenceville and what made it so life-changing. Among his “Five True Essentials of a Lawrenceville Education,” he included the diversity of the student body. “At Lawrenceville,” he wrote “it's the body of students that makes it so unique. I can still remember that in my class I met kids from around the world, around the country and around the town. From each of them I experienced a different view, a different way of deciding who I wanted to be and what model (and we had many) would we choose to become outstanding citizens of this world. It's an all-star class whether they are athletes, performers, ‘brainiacs’ or socially gifted. We lived a larger life through them so we could potentially be larger than life in what we wanted to achieve.”

Such an open, inquisitive attitude will not only enrich your experience here, but it will serve you well throughout your life, because the critical issues of the 21st century are complex, global ones that will require people to work across cultures and national borders and to incorporate often divergent points of view to develop solutions. Environmental sustainability is a prime example of such a global challenge. I'm very proud of the many efforts that we've made here over the past decade to become more sustainable – from our healthy, local dining to the rejuvenation of the pond, from our hybrid car fleet to our LEED certification of new buildings, from our founding of the Green Cup Challenge to

the organic garden behind Irwin, and, of course, the establishment and growth of the Island School. I'm also pleased to report that yesterday we signed a contract to build an almost 6 megawatt solar farm on some of our fields up 206, which will be one of the largest arrays east of the Mississippi and will provide over 90 percent of our electricity needs. Nevertheless, we still have a long way to go to become carbon neutral and that's where you all come in. We look for your leadership and involvement, because Lawrenceville's ultimate contribution to addressing the climate crisis will be not only what we do on campus, but also what *you* all do when you leave Lawrenceville, so I hope that you develop an environmental ethic while here.

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A final trend that I'm certain will continue to influence the School in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, but that I'm less certain how it will play out over the next hundred years is information technology. In fact, to predict with any specificity the impact that information technology will have on Lawrenceville in the next decade or even in the next few years *would* require a crystal ball.

The ubiquity of information technology and pace of technological change today is stunning to someone from my generation. When I entered college in the mid-1980s, my classmates and I brought electric typewriters; we left four years later with computers, though they were primitive by today's standards. Answering machines also first became popular when we were in college, and fax machines were introduced then too. Email was still the preserve of campus computer scientists, and the most cutting edge mobile phones were clunky handheld ones designed to mount in your car, certainly not slip in your pocket. Texting, Skyping and social networking were still science fiction. In one generation the imaginary became real.

And if information technology evolved rapidly while I was a student, the pace of change during the 1980s and 1990s was glacial compared to the past decade. According to a recent *Newsweek* article,

- in 2000, there were 12 *thousand* active blogs, today there are 141 *million*
- at the turn of the century, people made 100 *million* Google searches daily, today we make 2 *billion*
- in 2000, Americans sent 400 *thousand* text messages each day, in 2010 we send 4.5 *billion* texts
- iTunes, which didn't even exist in 2000, now accounts for 10 *billion* downloads

Not surprisingly given these trends, the average amount of time Americans spend online has increased dramatically over the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, from 2.7 hours per *week* in 2000 to almost 2.6 hours per *day* in 2010, and that's the average. Members of your generation are much more active users.

The new information technology presents incredible opportunities for communication, collaboration, information sharing, feedback, crowdsourcing and outreach. Literally at your fingertips you have access to everything from weather forecasts to medical advice; you can tell instantly precisely where you are and how to get to where you want to go; social networks have helped to expose voting irregularities and human rights violations and to build social movements and launch promising careers. We'll explore such uses and opportunities – and what they might mean for Lawrenceville – this coming year.

At the same time, there are significant downsides to our perpetual connectivity. Information technology can be used to spread destructive rumors, misinformation and hurtful postings just as easily as to transmit useful data and essential information. It can be used to harm and threaten, just as easily as to collaborate and support. And such abuses and misuses are permanent and widespread, because for all the Internet widens our reach, it narrows our private sphere in ways that we're only just now beginning to understand fully. In addition, as the article we all read this summer, *Dwelling in Possibilities*, and many other recent books and studies make clear, deep thought, quiet reflection, focused attention, sustained interaction, and down time – all of which are necessary for enduring learning – are much more difficult to achieve in our multi-media world of infinite choices, instant answers, limitless access and perpetual contact. Think of the last time you were off the grid for a sustained period of time and what that felt like. Can you imagine taking 20 minutes each day to disconnect? To be still? To walk around the pond or the campus woods? To slip into the Chapel? To savor the tranquility of the art gallery? Or to lose yourself in a novel – one not assigned for a class?

Our challenge as a community will be to harness the power of the new information technologies in productive ways, while mitigating their drawbacks by being thoughtful and intentional in our use so we can balance the excitement and possibilities of having “the world at our feet,” with the importance of having an inner world and respecting our private space. These are topics to which we'll return frequently throughout the year in various forums, and I invite you all to be part of those conversations, because it's essential that our discussions include both “digital natives” like you who have grown up in a virtually connected world and “digital immigrants,” which most of us faculty members are, who still remember what it felt like to be disconnected.

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I suspect that the Lawrentians who sang that refrain at the School's Centennial celebration would in many ways be surprised, but at the same time, largely pleased, by the state of the School today. May Lawrenceville's next century and this coming year bring similarly pleasant surprises. Best wishes to you all as we begin this school year and launch Lawrenceville's third century.

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I just encouraged you all to look forward 100 years. Now, I want to invite you to look

backwards, not 100 years, but rather nearly 50 years to the Fall of 1963 – to the time when computers were the size of rooms, when tape cassettes were the newest music technology, and when all the students in a House called home from a single rotary phone in the hall. That's when Latin and Greek Master and *Lawrence* advisor Mr. Ed Robbins came to teach at Lawrenceville. Mr. Robbins, who is the longest serving classroom teacher at Lawrenceville ever, begins his 48<sup>th</sup> and final year teaching at Lawrenceville this evening. Over the nearly half a century that Mr. Robbins has taught here, many things have changed, but many things have remained the same, including as Mr. Robbins readily acknowledges his passion for this place...and his tendency to mumble. We will celebrate his long tenure later in the year, but I'd like to invite Mr. Robbins to stand now so that we can convey our best wishes for a fabulous final year by applauding him.

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Each spring we award two House Cups for athletics. Last May, Stephens House won The Katherine W. Dresdner Cup and Dickinson House won The Foresman Trophy. This evening, I'm pleased to announce the winners of two additional House cups, The Chivers Cup to the House with the highest GPA and The Joanne T. Adams Cup, a new cup established in honor of the longtime director of community service who retired in 2009. The Adams Cup recognizes the House with the greatest commitment to community service. The 2010 winner of The Chivers Cup and the inaugural Adams Cup is Kirby House. Would last year's and this year's presidents please come forward to receive the cups on behalf of your House.