

An Association of Our Own

Part Three

by Stephen W. Herring, Class of 1976

Parts One and Two of this history of our Association were published in Echos in 2004 and 2005 as part of our 130th anniversary celebration. Part One traced our history from its founding in 1874 to 1964 when our College's long tradition as a school exclusively for women ended. Part Two covered the following forty years of change and challenge. With Part Three we look back at the ten eventful years that have brought us to a new milestone.

As our Association celebrated its 130th anniversary in 2004, it was emerging from a bruising legal battle with the College's trustees and embarking on a new chapter in its history with a new name, a redefined mission, and new leadership.

On September 15, 2004, the Middlesex Superior Court issued its injunction virtually ending the court case brought by the College's Board of Trustees. The three-page document set down several provisions intended to remove any possible perception that the Association is affiliated with or endorsed by the College. The most sweeping provision was the requirement of a name change. We thus became the Independent Association of Framingham State Alumni, with its catchy acronym IAFSA.

In addition to the changes imposed by the injunction, the Executive Board was dealing with the unexpected resignation the previous month of Executive Director Lisa Brouillette Holland '84. Fortunately, a ready and able replacement was on hand in Administrative Assistant Marilyn Booth Manzella '69. Marilyn served in an acting capacity until 2007, then filled that critical position with skill and dedication until her retirement in September, 2013.

During the months following the settling of the court case, relationships between the College, its alumni, and IAFSA were realigned and redefined. A two-year contractual agreement turned several alumni programs and services over to the College, including fund raising. The Association received a monthly stipend in compensation for its support of the College's Alumni office. The Association would focus its efforts on its scholarships and charitable programs, and appoint members to sit on the College's Foundation and Alumni Boards. The agreement included wording that opened the possibility of the sale of Alumni House to the College, a controversial topic that was debated and discussed many times, with hearings open to all alumni. Ultimately, the Executive Board voted not to sell the house.

The new role of the Association was formalized with the adoption of a new mission statement on June 19, 2006: "A self-governing, non-profit organization established in 1874 by dedicated alumni, the Independent Association of Framingham State Alumni continues its tradition of service by receiving and administering funds that provide scholarship and benevolent assistance, while maintaining Alumni House and collaborating with Framingham State College in pursuit of its mission."

Three months later a new era of collaboration and cooperation began when the IAFSA Executive Board invited new College President Timothy Flanagan and his wife Nancy to visit Alumni House. As a result of that meeting negotiations began to extend the contract with the College.

Further gestures of goodwill occurred in 2007 with the transfer of two artifacts of historic significance to the College: An early student desk, and Cyrus Peirce's globe of the constellations (the companion piece to Peirce's globe of the world which is preserved in the Whittemore Library).

As the contract with the College was nearing the end of its term in late 2007 there was a growing desire on the part of the Association to be as independent as its new name implied. This was enabled in large part by a generous bequest from the estate of Betty Whitney '35, an amazing alumna whose career as a dietitian included consulting with the king of Saudi Arabia. The bequest, exceeding one million dollars, not only provided financial security for the Association, but broadened the scope of its new philanthropic mission. Awards from existing scholarships were increased, and a new Whitney Scholarship established (for the 2013-14 year there are twenty Whitney Scholars).

The most innovative concept to come from the bequest was the Whitney Travel Grant Program. With this program alumni benevolence was extended to College faculty for the first time. These grants help with travel expenses for faculty members whose trips are intended to add value to their course delivery. To date, seventeen faculty members have received assistance totaling \$27,300.

The Whitney bequest was followed by additional bequests and gifts from various sources resulting in a host of new scholarships and awards, including:

- Mary Melley Cotter Scholarship (June, 2009)
- Boston Chapter of the American Sewing Guild Scholarship (February, 2011)
- Class of 1961 Textbook Assistance Award (May, 2011)
- Touch the Future Award (January, 2012)
- Murtaugh Scholarship (January, 2012)
- Alumni General Scholarship for students from Worcester County (gift from the former Worcester-Framingham Alumni Club, April, 2012)
- Susana R. Bernard Scholarship (January, 2013)
- Cannes Internship Scholarship (spring, 2013)

From 2005 to 2013, IAFSA scholarship grants went from \$31,950 to \$64,000.

Alumni were proud to hear in October of 2010 that their *alma mater* had been "promoted" to become Framingham State University. For the first time, the Association did not need to follow up with a corresponding change in its own name as "Framingham State Alumni" works either way.

Association-University relations continued to improve. In May, 2011, Executive Director Marilyn Booth Manzella, '69, was recognized at the University's All-Alumni General Assembly and Achievement Award Ceremony with the first Alumni Service Award.

Also, the Association released funds set aside for the benefit of the Heineman Ecumenical Center as improvements were needed, including most recently a new carillon system.

In the spring of 2012 the University embarked on a major fund raising campaign and reached out to the Association. After some negotiation, the Association agreed to pledge \$500,000 in scholarship assistance over seven years and “to continue to work in a collaborative and cooperative relationship with FSU, without entering into a consulting agreement.” (With this emphasis on scholarships, the Whitney Travel Grant program was suspended for the term of the commitment.)

This eventful decade ended with another round of leadership changes. Upon Marilyn Manzella’s retirement, Debra Regan Cleveland ’73 was appointed Executive Director of the Association. Debbie, long active in the Framingham community, had joined Marilyn as her assistant in June, 2011. Her background in marketing and Web hosting will help the Association take advantage of new technologies and trends, such as social media. Debbie assumed her responsibilities just weeks after the departure of University President Flanagan, who had accepted the presidency of Illinois State University.

As the Association plans to celebrate its 140th anniversary in 2014, it looks forward to working with a new administration, expanding its mission, and continuing to serve as a valuable asset to the greater Framingham State University community.

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