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From the President's Desk

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Among the memorable moments in our May 2 Commencement ceremonies was a touching story about one of our alumni which Class of 2010 President Alessandra Bollero shared with her fellow graduates.

Alessandra told them how, as a sophomore, she met IWU alumnus Frank Livingston '51, who discovered that she was a member of the women's golf team. "He began cutting out Argus articles about our team and sent them via mail to my parents," Alessandra recalled, adding that Frank also posted them in her local country club so family friends could follow the golf team's success. "I later found out he did this type of thing for a lot of current students and their families and, although he has recently passed, he lives on in my mind and heart as the ideal alum." As she noted, Frank Livingston was so proud of his university that he made a lifelong commitment to what he viewed as his role as a Titan.

I felt the same sense of pride implicit in Alessandra's remarks when I handed diplomas to more than 500 graduates and recalled some of their stories at Illinois Wesleyan — stories often involving support and encouragement from others. The commitment that older alumni like Frank Livingston make to new graduates like Alessandra Bollero is an integral part of the Wesleyan experience.

Sustaining the key elements of that experience has been uppermost in my mind over the past 18 months, as we responded to the economic challenges facing Illinois Wesleyan and other institutions. It was gratifying to report to the Board of Trustees in May that our budget would be balanced for the current fiscal year and for next year also. This is possible because of our success in admissions, a modest recovery in the stock market, and a significant budget realignment internally — an effort that required a combination of hiring controls, benefit adjustments, and expense reductions. Although these actions were painful, especially for faculty and staff, there was also a shared commitment to make difficult decisions now in order to ensure the quality of the University into the future.

Our spring admissions season resulted in a record number of applications, and we expect to enroll one of the largest classes in our history in the fall. With this academically strong first-year class and impressive retention of our current students, we are projected to exceed our overall enrollment target for 2010-11. This is an enviable position for the University, given the volatility in the economy and the continuing financial challenges being faced by many students and their families.

The success of our Transforming Lives: The Campaign for Illinois Wesleyan is another indicator of confidence in our plans for Illinois Wesleyan. We not only are meeting overall targets for the campaign but also are making steady progress on the goals for specific initiatives such as endowed professorships, student scholarships and The Wesleyan Fund. Despite the economy, it is clear to me that our alumni and friends have made Illinois Wesleyan one of their top philanthropic priorities.

As Alessandra noted in her speech to fellow seniors, “Whether we realize it or not, we would not be who we are without Illinois Wesleyan University written on our diplomas; we are unique because of this credential.” It will be exciting to see what mark Alessandra and her fellow graduates will make upon a world filled with new challenges and new opportunities. I, for one, believe we are in good hands.

Richard B. Wilson