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Myers' dreams for University preserved in words and images

One of the most emotionally powerful moments during the Aug. 25 commemoration of Minor Myers' life came during a video tribute that opened the ceremony. As the Shirk Center's lights dimmed, the words "In Memory of President Minor Myers, jr." appeared in white letters against a black background, projected onto a large screen behind the center stage.

The words faded and a selection of classical music began to play as photos of Myers taken from throughout his presidency were displayed in a moving montage.



As the campus mourned President Minor Myers' death, a video featuring photos and sound clips from his presidency offered solace during an Aug. 25 commemoration held in the Shirk Center. (Photo by Steve Smedley for *The Pantagraph*)

But the biggest impact came when Myers' own words emerged from the loudspeakers, in audio clips chosen from interviews and speeches he had given over his years as president. Hearing the distinctive cadence of his voice echo again through the Shirk Center, as it had for countless convocations and alumni luncheons over the past 14 years, made his absence feel painfully real. And yet, over the course of the seven-minute video, the presence of that voice ultimately felt reassuring, and as inspiring as ever.

Vice President of Public Relations Jeff Hanna had the difficult task of choosing potential audio segments. In reviewing several speeches and talks that have been taped over the years, he came across an interview that Myers gave in 2000 for an Alumni Office video. It was the 11th year of his presidency, not long before the University celebrated its Sesquicentennial. The opening of The Ames Library — a pinnacle among his achievements as Illinois Wesleyan's president — was still several months away.

The interview displays the IWU president's quick wit and expansive intellect, but it is the passion with which he describes Illinois Wesleyan's commitment to the liberal arts that leaves a lasting impression. Selections from that interview are printed below. As the campus community mourns his death, the words serve as powerful reminders that Myers' dreams for the future of Illinois Wesleyan, and higher education, live on.

On what Illinois Wesleyan means to him:

Oh, it means a lot of things. It's the education of students in a traditional place, studying traditional subjects that carry their minds with great flexibility and strength toward the future. It

is feeling here — on this small quad of a few acres — the essence of the world, of human history, of everything that has been, and what things might be.

On the importance of alumni:

Our alumni have cared for this place, they've worked, they've pushed, they've imagined, they've dreamed. And as you tour the campus, as you see the greens, and you see the buildings, and you see the students with their scholarships, this is alumni dreaming. And what we're doing now working with alums is to organize, centralize, and direct a new level of involvement, to make our new dreams a reality.

On the liberal arts' significance:

And what the liberal arts teach us is: What do we know? What should we know? What is good? And what is right? And in an era of specialization — when people focus for a career in intermittent bursts of four to six years on one thing, and then another, and then another — it's the liberal-arts mind that holds those specialties all together. Such a mind is trained, as John Wesley Powell said in our motto in the 1860s, in "Scientia et Sapientia" — knowledge and wisdom. The knowledge of details and facts, and the wisdom to ask, amongst all those facts, what is best, what is right, and what is just?

On his dreams for the University's future:

Dreams come easy on a college campus. They always have here. A lot of dreams are in our archives, imagined, never funded. And the fun thing about past decades is dreams and support have gone so well together. As we look ahead, at our own Sesquicentennial, we're going to be dreaming again. A lot of committees are going to do a lot of thinking about programs, about grounds, and buildings. We built a lot of buildings. Now the question will be doing more intensive and interesting things in them, making improvements in the programs we have. I can't believe that there won't be a building or two tucked into some of our plans and some of our dreams, but the dreams will always focus around the education of students and improving their lives.