**The Legacy of Minor Myers jr.**

**by Craig Hart**

**President, Illinois Wesleyan Board of Trustees**

Thanks primarily to Minor Myers, I am not unaccustomed to my role here this afternoon, charged with the task of finding something to say that has not already been said. I recall how often Minor and I would be seated together at some University occasion, and he would lean over to me and tell me that I should be prepared to make some comments. But he always went first. And you know what that meant. There was little left for me to say.  
  
In this case today, however, we can hardly say enough about our sense of loss at his passing. This feeling of great loss has settled upon us as we prepare for a new academic year and plan for the future.  
  
Just 15 years ago, Minor entered our lives like an invigorating gust of fresh and delightfully cool air from the Northeast. From the moment he first presented himself to the Presidential Search Committee at the preliminary interviews in Chicago, we knew this was a special man. He brought excitement and enthusiasm to the room. A twinkle in his eye, he had a presence that we had only hoped we might find among the 140 applicants for the position of 17th president of Illinois Wesleyan University.  
  
And those of us who have been with him in his Presidency over the past 14 years, those who have experienced the power of his inspiration, have never been disappointed with the decision that the Search Committee made. Minor was the man for our time, a man who brought special qualities and a combination of talents to this University at a time when they fit with a certain precision into the University’s circumstance. It was as if the man had been born, grown, and developed for this role of inspiration and leadership. We thank you, Lord, that our stars crossed and that we benefited from his presence. We have been fortunate he passed through our lives and made such a difference.  
  
Minor Myers was a man of the liberal arts and, true to his nature, he brought his passion for an undergraduate, residential liberal arts education and built that vision for Illinois Wesleyan.  
  
His enthusiasm created an atmosphere of happy and excited views of daily life. He saw the goodness in things. He saw the potential in students and what the University could mean in their lives.  
  
For more than 10 years, Minor and I met together often and had countless telephone conversations. No matter what my mood was going in, I invariably came out of that contact with the day brightened and my spirits uplifted, challenged, uplifted. He made a positive difference in the lives of the people he touched. He was excited about most things around him, about the University and what it could be, excited about students — their talents, accomplishments, potential. So many times he would comment on a promising new student applicant, many of whom were multitalented (a special interest of Minor’s), or the project of a current student, or the accomplishment of a young alum. He saw the significance of liberal arts education in their lives.  
  
His humor was always present and infectious. His light-hearted stories and reflections lifted spirits and shed light on the perspective of the moment. It was hard not to join in his joy of the day.  
  
Minor Myers inspired the University to recognize and seek its potential. He came to Bloomington/Normal realizing what a great University Illinois Wesleyan could be. He had the highest aspirations for the University, and he pushed us to join in that vision: A mission that started with inspiration and leadership he provided many times over. At his inauguration, Minor said this: "Our task here…is not to dwell on what is wrong, but to build on what is right…We can have hopes."  
  
Minor built upon a strong past, an excellent heritage that this University had in place upon his arrival. He strengthened faculty, increased faculty resources, enhanced planning, improved the academic mission and its direction. He led the effort to build and upgrade campus buildings with The Ames Library his crown jewel. That building represented a daunting challenge and an almost impossible vision when he started. But, with all that was Minor Myers, he achieved that most formidable goal and set before the world a campus that is the envy of many liberal arts schools, and the destination that most student applicants cannot resist.  
  
He emphasized to all the value and importance of multitalented students, minority students, and international students to the diversity and quality of a strong and accomplished student body and to the success of the University.  
  
Minor led the effort to redefine the marketing plan of Illinois Wesleyan with a plan to attract a diverse, talented (multitalented, if you will) student body. A plan to make known the secret of Illinois Wesleyan. He capitalized on an already strong admissions effort, leading to record numbers of applicants and a 41percent acceptance rate, which places the University with the outstanding liberal arts universities in the nation. And with this all has come the recognition that he knew should follow.  
  
Yes, Minor Myers has made a difference at Illinois Wesleyan, and he has done this as a man of the liberal arts. There is a spirit here today that reflects that accomplishment. He was the heart and soul of Illinois Wesleyan.  
  
But now Minor Myers has passed. We will no longer seem him bound across campus with that great energy and enthusiasm. We will no longer enjoy his wit, his fascination with the world around him, his delight with music, and his love of old books. His pride in the students who are coming here, who are studying here now, and those who have accomplished their potential in the world. But with the absence of his physical presence, we have much to remember, much to cherish, much to inspire and move us forward.  
  
For Minor Myers leaves a great legacy for Illinois Wesleyan and all those who are a part of this institution: A clear challenge to keep Minor’s vision alive. We have an inspiration to set lofty goals, to continue to build and to seek to make this University the best it can be.  
  
In December, Minor was interviewed by the *Illinois Wesleyan University Magazine* and was asked to reflect on the next phase of his presidency. "It is our task," he said, "to see what we definitely need to do, what we might like to do if resources allow it, and what the campus would look like if we did those things. So in one sense, the sky is the limit."  
  
For Minor, the sky was always the limit. He was not satisfied with being less than the best. And in memorializing him, we should not be satisfied, either. Let us leave here today overjoyed and inspired by the fact that Minor Myers came to us 15 years ago and by the leadership he provided. We must embrace the confidence he gave us, the confidence to set lofty goals, to accept the challenge those goals create — with the same passion, the same enthusiasm that Minor showed us day by day. We should go from this place and build upon the legacy he has given us all. We owe him nothing less.