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## **This IS my Linfield**

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# This IS my Linfield

By Debbie Harmon Ferry '90

**A**s I watched construction crews this summer begin the process of turning Mac Hall into something new and wonderful (see page 8), I was reminded of my own history with that building. Nearly 50 years ago, Linfield was in serious financial trouble. Faculty members were asked to help clean the residence halls in preparation for fall semester, since the cleaning services staff had been severely reduced as part of budget cuts.

My father, Dave Hansen, was an economics professor, and our family was part of the crew that cleaned Mac Hall. I have vivid and fond memories of that summer, including one recollection of my mother throwing a scrub brush at a bat that had flown into the building. She missed the bat and instead clocked me in the head.

Bat scares and bruises aside, in a time of great challenge, the community came together and Linfield survived.

It was that sense of community that drew me back to Linfield for my education and has inspired me to stay as an employee for 28

years. This past year might have been the most difficult of them all.

Trying to deliver a quality education and residential experience and keeping our community safe during a global pandemic while navigating political and racial unrest would seem to be challenging enough. And it was.

Unfortunately, we also had a series of internal problems play out very publicly. The university was the focus of many stories in local, regional, national and social media that involved issues that were – like many things in life – complex, multifaceted and interpreted very differently by people in different positions.

Like many people across the country, everyone at Linfield seemed to be under an inordinate amount of stress. I know the anxiety and frustration many felt when they heard others express harsh views without having all the information. This was seemingly made worse when the university, bound by confidentiality and personnel policies, remained relatively quiet.

I believe some of our internal issues are amplified because we

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are all talking past each other, and not with each other. But I know from my conversations with colleagues that while not everything was handled as well as it could have been, the leaders of this university feel the weight of their responsibility acutely and take the concerns of our community very seriously.

Every faculty or staff member I know, in fact, cares deeply about Linfield. I strongly believe that now, more than ever, we need to listen to each other, offer grace, pull together and rebuild trust.

## Focus on mission

When we work together and focus on our mission, we are at our best. That was true when I scrubbed sinks and doors in Mac Hall decades ago, and it's true now. It's time for all of us — administration, faculty, staff, students, alumni — to put our energies into serving students and doing what we do best: sparking intellectual curiosity, exploration and discovery. The type of education and experience we offer here can be life changing, for students, for their families and for our larger community.

Linfield is at its core a small school that offers big opportunities. Every student matters. I have had the privilege to work for a very long time alongside colleagues whose dedication to our students is without question. This year alone, amid some incredible challenges, I witnessed professors who retooled entire syllabi to make sure their material could be delivered safely within COVID restrictions. Professors such as Patrick Cottrell not only taught online, in-person and hybrid courses but also created new programs, such as a minor in Leadership and Ethics Across the Disciplines, while redesigning the general education curriculum. He and many other professors were creative, innovative and tireless in their efforts to educate and guide our students.

The athletic staff found ways to build team and community without knowing if they would be able to compete. They taught athletes the fundamentals of their sports while also teaching life lessons and developing camaraderie. To do that during the pandemic, they had to find new ways to practice drills, regularly test their athletes and — after competition was eventually allowed in the spring — create exciting game-day atmospheres often without spectators.

Patty Haddeland and her team in the Student Health, Wellness and Counseling Center tested every student for COVID, quarantined those necessary, offered meal delivery and care packages to those who were in isolation and managed the mental health of our students during a very stressful year. They did all of that while making certain that Linfield was compliant with state and local regulations. Their efforts were herculean, and Patty was lauded by Yamhill County health officials as the gold star against which other Oregon universities should have been judged this year.



**Dave and Sharon Hansen and Debbie Harmon Ferry '90 in Riley Gym in the early '70s.**

I saw similar care and dedication coming from our colleagues in facilities. When we held a “carmencement” on May 2, one student’s parents were unable to attend because his father had contracted COVID. Members of the facilities team that the student worked with decorated one of the Linfield trucks and proclaimed, “We’re your family now!” They cheered as loudly as any other family celebrating that day, and I know I wasn’t the only one who shed tears witnessing it.

## Student successes

Linfield is a place that educates the whole student by offering learning and growth opportunities on the athletic fields, in concert halls and in residence halls. Students’ lives are transformed by studying abroad and participating in theatre. Leadership opportunities are plentiful through student government, campus employment, fraternity/sorority life and more. Classes and professors are vitally important at Linfield, and so are coaches, career advisers, housing directors and others who help guide students as they discover their skills and passions outside the classroom.

I celebrated this year as our students excelled in a national podcast competition, presented at our annual symposium and announced their job or graduate-school plans. I beamed with joy while I watched the luau, creatively staged outdoors and with masks to comply with COVID restrictions. I celebrated our softball and tennis teams

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and track athletes as they earned regional and national victories. Meanwhile, the Linfield student population is as diverse as it has ever been, with 32 percent of our students the first in their families to attend college. These student successes make me proud to be affiliated with Linfield.

## Looking forward, pulling together

For the sake of our students, as well as each other, we need to build a path toward our shared future. I believe it will be a beautiful future, based on our amazing history and the remarkable goodwill of the people I know and cherish at this institution. We need to assume we are all operating with the best of intentions — because I believe we all are.

When we disagree, let’s listen to each other, have a civil discussion and work together to fix the problems. If student life can be improved, let’s collaborate so those who join the Linfield community can have the best experience possible. If we can take steps to improve outcomes after graduation, let’s band together to do that, too. We can do this. We have to do this.

Linfield is a family, at least to me. Alumni such as Bob Lunt '52, Nancy (Steinbach) Haack '69, Kurstin Finch Gnehm '97 and Samantha (Bartlett) Gallagher '10 feel like my own flesh and blood. I recall colleagues such as Brenda DeVore Marshall, Randy Grant, Jeff Mackay '88, Lisa Knodle-Bragiel '85 and so many more who have dedicated decades of their lives to this institution. I think of recent grads Sean Webster '21 and Mikayla Sponsel '21, whose accomplishments bring me as much joy as my own children’s successes.

Families have differences and disagreements. My Linfield family has encountered tough times before, but like most families, we found a way to weather the storm. I believe in us. I know we can commit to doing right by the students and to making this the best Linfield it can be.

I cannot do anything about events in the past, but I am committed to focusing on the future and to finding ways to move forward together. I invite you to join me to continue building a welcoming, supportive and safe community.

This IS my Linfield. This is my home and my family. This is a place I care deeply about with a long history, and as long as I am fortunate enough to work here, I plan to do all I can to preserve it for future generations of students.



School of Business faculty and Dean Jennifer R. Madden congratulate a May 2021 graduate at Carmencement on the McMinnville campus.