

2006

Law School Dedicates The Class of 1975 Timothy J. Sullivan Classroom

Jaime Welch-Donahue



Law School Dedicates The Class of 1975 Timothy J. Sullivan Classroom

By Jaime Welch-Donahue

November 27, 2006

“Institutions that prevail take strength from their pasts. They remember their heroes,” said Dean Taylor Reveley at the dedication of The Class of 1975 Timothy J. Sullivan Classroom at the Law School on Nov. 17.

Sullivan joined the Law School faculty in 1972. Rising quickly through the ranks, he became a full professor and associate dean in 1977. In 1984 he was appointed the John Stewart Bryan Professor of Jurisprudence and in 1985 became dean. In 1992 the Board of Visitors elected Sullivan the twenty-fifth president of the College of William & Mary, a post he held until 2005. In 2006 he accepted the post of president and chief executive officer of The Mariners’ Museum of Virginia.

Reveley said there was rich symbolism in having the Sullivan lecture hall adjacent to The Class of 1983 William B. Spong, Jr. Classroom. “Dean Sullivan and Dean Spong labored back to back, during crucial years when the fate of the modern law school at William & Mary hung in the balance. They did what had to be done to ensure that Marshall-Wythe would flourish.”

“By any measure, Tim was a seminal figure in the life of the Law School and in the life of all of the College,” said Reveley at the ceremony during which he unveiled a plaque that will be placed at the lecture hall’s entrance. College President Gene R. Nichol and Evan E. Adair, a 1975 Law School alumnus, joined Reveley in praising Sullivan.

A 1966 graduate of the College, Sullivan earned his law degree at Harvard University and afterward served in the Army Signal Corps in Vietnam, earning the Army Commendation Medal, First Oak Leaf Cluster, and Bronze Star. During his thirteen years at the helm of the College, he was as a tireless advocate for increased state support for higher education and was credited with raising William & Mary’s visibility on the national and international level.

His admiration of the College and his insights about teaching are evident in remarks he made in 2000 which are excerpted on the plaque: “The keys to unlock answers to questions about William & Mary’s resiliency and greatness are quite simple. We define excellence in terms absolute not relative, we respect the indispensable power



of tradition and memory, we believe women and men have hearts as well as minds and both require assiduous cultivation, and we know intimate and sustained personal relationships are indispensable to both great teaching and profound learning.”

At their thirtieth law school reunion in 2005, the Class of 1975 presented Sullivan with a piece of mahogany paneling and announced that they would fund, in his honor, the transformation of one of Marshall-Wythe’s largest classrooms into an elegant, state-of-the-art lecture hall.

“Our first year of law school was Tim’s first year here,” said Adair, adding that his and his classmates’ respect for Sullivan sprang from the recognition that he was someone who went “beyond the basic measure.” “It was a pleasure to do something to thank you for all you have done,” Adair said, “and to do so in a way that will help students today and tomorrow.”

Hailing his predecessor in the president’s office as “one of William & Mary’s greatest citizens,” Nichol noted that the Sullivan legacy is unique for its combination of “aspiration, attainment, eloquence, and courage.”

Nichol read from a resolution passed by the College’s Board of Visitors on the morning of the dedication: “The Sullivan Classroom will supply a space for engaged, enlightened, and ennobling legal jurisprudence of the caliber Tim has molded as the John Stewart Bryan Professor The Board commends the Marshall-Wythe School of Law for recognizing one of its very best by establishing The Class of 1975 Timothy J. Sullivan Classroom.”

Sullivan said the tribute left him at a loss for words and that he was deeply honored that a classroom bearing his name should be proximate to one honoring Dean Spong. He thanked the Class of 1975 for this recognition and also hailed those in the audience who, during his tenure as Law School dean, “were committed to the improvement of this school, not on the basis of its greatness at the time” but who had been stalwart in the belief “that the past which defines us could be a truer indicator of the future.”

“If you look at what has happened to the William & Mary Law School in one lifetime, in one generation,” Sullivan said, “it is a miraculous story. I think the reason that miracle was possible was that faith, that commitment, of so many on the faculty and among the alumni.”



WILLIAM & MARY
LAW SCHOOL

P.O. Box 8795
Williamsburg, VA 23187-8795

The Law School, said Sullivan, “has a future that we can’t yet imagine, as long as those who follow us remember the root idea that this place was created to train and educate citizen lawyers.” In his estimation, he said, the standard by which to judge Marshall-Wythe’s graduates is “how better is the cause of humanity because of their education and their service.”