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From the Hill

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The Erstwhile Elm City

Colby and Waterville face challenges together

By Stephen Collins '74

Throughout the country, colleges and universities are forging new partnerships with the towns they call home. Yale, the University of Pennsylvania, Trinity and Connecticut colleges are a few that have, very publicly, come to the aid of their distressed cities. Waterville, while miles and magnitudes away from the problems of Hartford, Philadelphia and New Haven, nevertheless faces challenges as the economy shifts from manufacturing to services and technology and as markets become global. Thus Colby and Waterville, with a close town-gown relationship soon to enter its third century, are forming new links to address new challenges.

Waterville, home to Colby since 1817, evokes different memories for successive generations of Colbians. Some denizens of the old campus claim that the youthful vitality of college students is missed downtown. A later generation is nostalgic for Parks' Diner, Onie's, The Majestic restaurant and the warren of streets between Main and Elm that were replaced by The Concourse in the 1960s. Main Street has struggled in recent years. Clothiers Dunham's, Butler's and Stern's closed in the 1980s, and Levine's went out of business in 1996 after 107 years anchoring the south end of Main Street. Soon afterwards the Shop'n Save supermarket in The Concourse closed in favor of super stores in outlying shopping centers.

The paper mill across the Kennebec in Winslow is quiet (and odorless) after Kimberly-Clark shut it down two years ago. Cascade Woolen Mill, which produced fine fabrics for more than



In the 1960s (left photo) buildings between Appleton and Temple Streets, including the popular Parks' Diner, were razed. Temple and Silver Streets are the heart of Waterville's downtown district.

100 years in Oakland, likewise succumbed to the pressures of global competition. Diamond Match in Oakland, the Ski-Land Woolen Mill in Clinton and Wyandotte Industries in Waterville are other mothballed relics in an emerging post-industrial environment.

Today visitors coming from exit 33 on I-95 have to negotiate nine traffic lights and pass three shopping centers to get downtown, and the route from exit 34 passes the Elm Plaza shopping center and a battery of fast-food restaurants. The satellite shopping centers have spread activity away from the old center. That, coupled with shoppers' willingness to drive to Augusta, Bangor and Portland, has challenged the economic health of Main Street. Colby, recognizing the importance of a vibrant city center, has stepped forward to offer assistance.

President William R. Cotter

was a founding member of the Mid State Economic Development Corporation, formed in the early 1990s. When the former Stern's Department Store building suffered foreclosure in 1996, Cotter mobilized a coalition of nonprofit and corporate sponsors who formed the Waterville Regional Arts and Community Center to buy the building and run it as a cultural center. Colby trustees authorized the lead gift of \$100,000 to establish The Center. Today the complex contains retail shops and services, offices, community organizations and the city council chambers.

At their January meeting trustees established The Colby College Downtown Development Loan Program and earmarked up to \$1 million for low-interest loans to encourage responsible development in the old business district or to keep

businesses on Main Street.

Last spring, as the city government was reorganizing after a mayoral recall referendum, Cotter convened a Downtown Advisory Group to work on in-town beautification and new public events, new business development and waterfront redevelopment along the Kennebec River. Members of the group, predominantly stakeholders in the downtown sector, have been working with the city's new mayor, Nelson Madore, and new city administrator, Ronald Singel, who enthusiastically welcomed the support and interaction.

While the downtown still has its challenges, signs of progress abound. The employment rate is good, as mill jobs have been replaced in other sectors of the economy. The C.F. Hathaway shirt company still turns out dress shirts alongside the Kennebec after a group of Maine



when Waterville created The Concourse. Today (right photo) the buildings between

investors brought it back from the brink three years ago. L.L. Bean moved a call center into the JFK Mall and recently announced it will expand its holiday season operations there to year-round. The *Morning Sentinel* put up a new building facing Castonguay Square several years ago, and The Concourse was spruced up with an ambitious redesign and overhaul. Both Shaw's Plaza and Elm Plaza shopping centers recently announced plans for expansion.

In Oakland, Town Manager Michael Roy '74 helped orchestrate creation of a high-tech business park near Exit 33. The Kennebec Regional Development Authority's multi-million-dollar First Park is a multi-town initiative that won a statewide competition for funding and should break ground next spring. A new bridge south of downtown established a second link

with Winslow, where Crowe Rope set up a manufacturing plant in a former warehouse, and an existing biotech and a precision machine firm were purchased by new parent companies.

The Chinett Company, formerly Keyes Fibre, still produces paper plates and containers from recycled materials on the Fairfield-Waterville town line, and Sappi Fine Paper/North America between Waterville and Skowhegan remains one of the state's largest employers.

The Elm City isn't what it used to be. In fact, Elm Street lost the last of its stately elms this summer. But in some ways it's more than it used to be, and as a new economy emerges, Colby and the people who bridge the College and the community are proving they're ready to help Waterville face the challenges common to so many small towns today.

Most Wired, Most Prepared

"Y2K Bugs To Be Remedied Late," proclaimed the headline on an Associated Press story in September. "No country in the world will get all of the systems fixed by January 1," the story said.

Details implied that one should think twice before boarding commuter flights in Bulgaria on New Year's Eve and that trusting traffic lights in Angola could be dicey once the date rolls. In the U.S. the health care industry—"because doctors, hospitals and payment systems are so decentralized"—was running behind.

"Y2K readiness is of greatest concern in developed countries such as the United States because they are most dependent on information technology," the AP reported. And a college on the *Yahoo! Internet Life* most-wired-colleges list is among the most dependent entities and, thus, may have the most cause for concern.

Colby has taken the threat seriously. A contingency planning task force is chaired by Raymond Phillips, director of information technology services.

"Work has been underway since the early 1990s to prepare the College's IT systems for the year 2000 date change," Phillips reported. By May, all campus systems were rated "fully compliant" with two exceptions—a few devices that are part of Johnson Controls environmental control systems, which passed tests this summer, and a few older Windows microcomputers, which were fixed or replaced.

Questions raised about the relative preparedness of outside vendors and government agencies proved more problematic. The starting date for this year's Jan Plan term was pushed back a day (to January 4) to help cope with the extraordinary travel volume that's anticipated and to delay travel until transportation systems check out.

Phillips and department heads have contingency plans for the electrical supply, food delivery, water supply, propane deliveries, and banking services. A test of the College's phone switching hardware was planned for the fall break.

Unlike Hunter Thompson, who wrote in *Rolling Stone*, "I am hoarding bullets, many thousands of them. . . . After the year 2000, the only people who'll be safe to have as friends will be dead people," Colby planners are not panicky. But they do have a sobering reference from which to work: "The ice storm of January 1998 pointed out both the responsiveness of the people of Maine to disasters and some weaknesses in the emergency response capabilities," the task force's report stated. So, in addition to its advance preparations, Colby will have five evaluation teams mobilized before midnight January 1 to see if there are any surprises, and they won't relax until Jan Plan is underway.



CBB Consortium Opens Study Abroad Centers

International study opportunities, long a priority at Colby, took an important step forward this fall as two of three new collaborative Colby, Bates and Bowdoin centers opened abroad. The CBB London Center, administered by Colby, began its inaugural term September 6, and the CBB Quito Center in Ecuador, run by Bates, also opened this fall. A center administered by Bowdoin in Capetown, South Africa, will offer courses beginning in September 2000.

The CBB study abroad consortium was developed with the

help of an \$886,500 award from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. The three colleges proposed the collaboration to make the study abroad experience more coherent and to coordinate it better with the home campuses' curricula. By pooling their resources, Colby, Bates and Bowdoin are able to maintain three programs that meet their collective standards, giving students from all three institutions a wider range of choices than one college could offer by itself.

The CBB London Center is Colby's most ambitious satellite initiative to date, said Jon

Weiss, director of academic affairs and off-campus study. Colby established a corporation—Colby College U.K. Ltd.—and purchased a five-story, 18th-century building at 19 Bloomsbury Square, near the British Museum and the London School of Economics. Since renovations won't be complete until this winter, the two dozen students in the inaugural semester are in rented space a few blocks away. Occupancy and a dedication of the Bloomsbury Square property will take place in January.

One goal of the consortium,

and the off-campus study program more broadly, is to balance the benefits of cultural immersion with the maintenance of Colby's academic standards. Foreign study usually is a powerful experience for students, but often it is poorly integrated with a student's program of study, and many programs are not as rigorous as officials at Colby, Bates and Bowdoin would like. The CBB programs are an innovative attempt to provide the cathartic experience of living abroad along with the academic rigor that is a hallmark at all three Maine colleges.



Groundskeeper Rodney Ferland operates an 11-foot-wide mower with precision, helping keep Colby on the most beautiful campus list.

Grounds for Approbation

Colby's campus moved up to number two in The Princeton Review's annual ranking of America's most beautiful campuses—behind only the University of Richmond. Credit J. Fredrick Larson, the original architect of the Mayflower Hill campus, credit campus leaders who judiciously expanded the original plan, and credit the hardworking folks in the Physical Plant Department who keep Colby's 58 buildings and 714 acres spiffy.

Students often remark that it's the open spaces and expansive lawns that attracted them to Colby. "It's one of the first things people notice when they tour," said Keith Stockford, grounds supervisor. "That first impression is important."

While handsome terraces give Colby an advantage in national beauty contests, budgetary support and administrative appreciation also help Colby achieve the national ranking, Stockford says. Equipment, sod, irrigation, fertilizer and a half ton of grass seed each year aren't inexpensive, and neither are training courses for groundskeepers.

Perhaps most critical is the crew's belief in the importance of its work. Thirteen full-time workers maintain the grounds and are augmented by seven summer workers. Rodney Ferland is "one of our proudest," said groundskeeper Danny Huard. "You couldn't meet a nicer guy." Ferland, after more than 20 years at Colby, maneuvers the 11-foot mower around campus like a surgeon, tilting the side decks so they don't scalp the terraces and skillfully avoiding obstacles.

Dana Jones, who is the athletic field striper, watches games on television "to see how straight their lines are," said Stockford. Jones is such a perfectionist with the blue "C" on the football field that coaches of other Colby teams have requested exact replicas on their fields. "It's the added things that we like to do," said Stockford. "It dresses it up." Now, with a horticulturist recently added, "we have a very diverse crew," he said. "There is very little we can't accomplish."

The grounds crew maintains about 100 acres of lawns and sports fields and mows another 200 acres twice a year. "It takes seven people to mow and trim the entire campus," said Stockford, describing a cycle that ends Friday afternoon and begins again Monday morning. It takes one person two months to prune plantings, and another person was hired this summer solely to remove weeds. Getting things green in time for commencement is an annual challenge, but the most hectic days are spent preparing for the opening of school.

While Stockford is clearly proud of his unit's contribution to the number two ranking, nobody is resting on any laurels. If anything, the ranking has been a spur to even higher aspirations in the spirit of the old Avis car rental ads: "We're number two so we try harder."



Lee L'Heureux '03, summer station manager at WMHB, spent his time with lawyers and engineers working on a licensing snafu.

Do Change that Dial

WMHB-FM, Colby's community radio station, is going back on the air this fall for its 34th year. Which wouldn't be news but for the fact that it shut down voluntarily in July and remained off the air for the rest of the summer while officials scrambled to get FCC approval for a new frequency.

This summer Lee L'Heureux '03 expected that his job as station manager during the months between his graduation from Waterville High School and his matriculation at Colby would amount to "just making sure everything ran smoothly." Trouble was, it didn't.

In July he learned that WMHB had, for more than 10 years, been broadcasting at 90.5 MHz even though it was licensed for 91.5 MHz. Only recently, when the Maine Public Radio network filed for the 90.5 frequency to fill in a weak sector in its coverage, did the problem come to light.

Research revealed that in the 1980s the people running WMHB filed to change its frequency from 91.5 to accommodate Maine Public Radio when it began broadcasting on 91.3 in the Waterville area. With a lack of continuity in the largely student-run station, no one ever followed up on the application and the change was never approved.

So instead of dealing with sponsors, schedules and record companies all summer, L'Heureux worked with Dean of Students Janice Kassman and Director of Student Activities Lisa Hallen, lawyers and engineers. His on-air experience in three years as a WMHB DJ during high school served him well—he handled media interviews about the situation like a pro.

Hallen and L'Heureux reported in September that a solution had been approved for WMHB to resume broadcasting at low power, enough to cover the campus area, while it awaits FCC approval to resume sending a stronger signal that helped build a loyal corps of listeners in surrounding towns.

wit and wisdom

"We start here."

Director of Intercultural Affairs Jeri Roseboro, to the Class of '03, quoting the summer reading (*"Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?"*), which advocated breaking the silence about racism.

"Real places are not defined by arbitrary political boundaries."

Gary Snyder, Pulitzer prize-winning poet, pioneering environmentalist and Zen Buddhist, at a roundtable discussion on poetry and the bio-regional voice.

"Courage and endurance."

Didier Kamundu Batundi, Colby's 1999-2000 Oak Human Rights Fellow, when asked what resources he had to build and run a human rights organization in war-torn Zaire.

"The fat is in the fire."

Brian Wiercinski '92, to Charlie Bassett, lamenting both the sixth unanswered varsity goal and the girth of some of the alumni players in September's annual alumni men's soccer game.

"It only took you 20 years to graduate!"

Benjamin Humphreys '00, Student Government Association president, upon making Bill Cotter an honorary member of the Class of 2000 following the State of the College address. (And before the hall cleared, plans were in motion to sign up Cotter for the Senior Pledge drive.)

"If you bring an apple for lunch, don't put it on your head."

Dean of the College Earl Smith, explaining that, though the campus is an official Wildlife Management Area where hunting is banned, new signs were being posted in the wake of a new Maine law that permits archers to hunt deer in city limits.

Boyle Will Edit Colby

Gerry Boyle '78, author of five acclaimed mystery novels and an award-winning newspaper column, "According to Boyle," has been named managing editor of *Colby* magazine. Boyle, who began his editorial duties at Colby in October, was a staff member at the *Central Maine Morning Sentinel* for 18 years, most recently news editor. He has contributed freelance articles to *Colby*, including "Hanging It Up," in the summer issue, about Professor Charles Bassett's attempt to retire. Boyle, whom reviewers have compared to Robert B. Parker '54, published his latest book, *Borderline*, in 1998 and awaits publication of *Cover Story* early next year. He replaces J. Kevin Cool, who is now editor of the Stanford Law School alumni magazine.