

Title: Leading the Way Together: A Call to Serve

President Seifert's Inaugural Address

Delivered on September 21, 2023

What an extraordinary day. I am so proud and humbled to be here. Thank you all for joining us.

Today we celebrate Siena College and everything that we've accomplished since the time of our founding 86 years ago tomorrow and everything we will accomplish as we lead the way together in the years to come.

There are so many (actually too many) people to thank and recognize. First, please know that you are important to me. I have learned from each of you and you have positively impacted my life.

I would like to personally welcome:

- Albany Bishop Edward Scharfenberger
- Siena Board Chairman Tom Baldwin
- Past Siena Presidents
 - Fr. Kevin Mullen (2017-2014)
 - Dr. Maggie Madden (interim 2019-2020)
- Elected Officials – (Need official designation)
 - Colonie Town Supervisor Peter Crummey
 - Assemblymember Patricia Fahy
 - New York State Senator Jake Ashby
 - Assemblymember John McDonald
- Current and past members of the Board of Trustees
- President's Cabinet
- General Faculty Chair Sara Berke
- Other College Presidents and Delegates
- James Hunter, excuse me, *Dr.* Hunter and his wife, Denise
- All Faculty, Staff and Administrators
- And of course, all the students

I would also like to recognize some guests that have been particularly influential.

- The wife and family of Patrick Sheridan – Mary, Matt, Penelope and Joshua Sheridan – Pat is responsible for me being here. He took a chance on me and hired me in 1996.

- My first department chair – Bonni Baker Arbuckle
- Four of my college roommates – Bo, Dan, Jay and John (they will not be available to provide any information regarding my college days)
- My unofficially adopted parents – Ray and Dee Seidel
- My father-in-law Bert Davis
- My sister-in-law Chris and her fiancé Mark
- My sister Cindy and her husband Rick
- My daughter Jenna and her fiancé Tyler
- My son Will and his girlfriend Abbey
- And of course, my best friend, partner and love of my life, and spouse for 33 years, Deb.

I also want to take a moment to recognize someone who couldn't be with us here today. My mother-in-law Peg, who has been an incredible source of support and inspiration to Deb and I, unfortunately, couldn't attend due to a serious injury suffered earlier this week. She's watching this ceremony, and I know she would appreciate your warm wishes and positive energy. So, I invite all of you to stand up for a moment.

Now, let's all raise our hands and form a heart shape. Hold it up high for a few seconds, and let's send a collective message of love, healing, and good wishes to Peg.

Thank you all for this heartfelt gesture. Together we are the Siena Community! It is truly impossible for me to convey how impactful you have all been in my life. Thank you.

On move-in day, I had the special opportunity to officially declare our first-year students Saints of Siena College just after they passed through the archway at the Bells of Remembrance and filled the Grotto. All summer I was focused on numbers. Accepted students, confirmed students, yield rates, transfer rates, retention. All-important, but all just numbers. However, having the chance to address our students and see them all in one place was a highly impactful moment that really cemented the significance of this position. When addressing them, I indicated that there are few moments in life that you'll always remember. I went on to say that graduation will certainly be one of those moments and so will their move-in day.

Well, please believe me, that this day will be one of those moments for me. This day is wonderful and, candidly, a little surreal. I am truly blessed to serve an organization I love so much. We are the best organization I have ever had the chance to work for or with. I know that I'm a better person and leader because this community accepted me 27 years ago. Also, to keep everything in perspective, there are certainly many ceremonial aspects of today but I've really worked on making this day focused on *us* as a community. It's about who we are together, and what we can become. I will be talking more about that shortly.

In my first day letter in June, I emphasized the importance of community and everyone being an important member of the Siena Community. We are all Saints. In fact, I think it is important to not divide the community into faculty, staff, administrators, trustees and students. It is critically important to focus on all of us being community members. We need to lead the way to achieve our mission:

Siena is a learning community advancing the ideals of a liberal arts education rooted in our identity as a Franciscan and Catholic institution.

Focusing on and supporting that mission has to be all of our top priorities. I know it is mine. If we are engaged in anything that is not directly supporting our mission, we have to change it so it does, or simply stop doing it.

So, where are we and what can we become?

Where are we?

- We have developed outstanding new programs and teaching practices (40% of incoming students are in majors that didn't exist eight years ago).
- We have invested in our facilities:
 - Patricia Gioia Hall provides a lasting first impression for our students
 - Nobel Hall will help us meet our full potential in the sciences
 - Our residence halls, townhouses, Lonnstrom dining hall are more welcoming for students.
- We have invested in the student experience inside the classroom and beyond:
 - Strengthening opportunities for hands-on learning and collaborative research
 - Developing diverse and dynamic academic and student life programming
 - Creating new traditions that build Siena spirit and pride
 - and investing significantly in services and resources that meet our students where they are with the support they need.

We are focused on delivering the "Education for a Lifetime" and we have been successful. Further, our successes have been recognized and we've received numerous accolades:

- Two weeks ago, we were ranked as the 91st best college in the country by the Wall Street Journal.
- We are a top-10 Catholic college in the country.
- Our campus has been ranked as one of the 50 most beautiful campus in the country.
- We are the #1 institution in NYS for getting a job after graduation three years in a row.

Our community based on our Catholic and Franciscan values is our distinctive competency.

These rankings didn't just happen. Every community member worked incredibly hard to make sure we are meeting our mission and enhancing the student experience...both inside and outside the classroom. Also, we didn't focus on outcomes and rankings; we focused on the student experience that resulted in our exceptional outcomes and rankings.

We all need to be loud and proud. We need to bring the Loud to Loudonville! Also, we need to build a little more swagger. Every community member needs to know how special we are and believe in the impact we all have on the student experience. To honor our traditions, we need to be humble, but we also need to be proud.

I know we are all proud to be members of this community. We also need to be proud of Siena and all of our accomplishments. Let's come together and let the world know what makes Siena so special.

What can we become?

We will be in high demand and nationally recognized for our dynamic and extraordinary student experience. We do a fantastic job now. However, there is room to make some incremental improvements that over time will have a transformational impact. We need to cement our culture of excellence.

With a culture of excellence, we will create an environment that breeds servant leaders. After all, the theme for the inauguration is "Leading the Way Together: A Call to Serve." Inviting James Hunter here was not a coincidence. Of all the articles and books I've read, and all the courses and seminars I've attended, Jim's work on servant leadership and culture has had the greatest impact on me. Honestly, to follow his guidance, it's incredibly easy and difficult at the same time. The main tenants of his work are clear and very hard to refute. The difficulty comes when you try to live the servant leadership life all day every day. It's even more difficult to develop a culture of excellence that permeates all areas in an organization.

With a culture of excellence:

- Everyone is rowing in the same direction and at the same speed.
- A high trust environment is developed where everyone is focused on the success of all community members.
- An organization where everyone holds all community members accountable for delivering excellence. Together we empower performance that demands excellence.

So, how do we go about building and developing a culture of excellence? First, we have to focus on being excellent in every interaction. I honestly mean every interaction. We do a fantastic job of holding doors for each other. I also know we are a very caring community and are well on our way. However, there are probably a few areas we could be even more consistent:

- Engage in active discourse. Truly listening to what others have to say and listening to understand as compared to refute. One of the main tenants of our Franciscan values is affirmation of the unique worth of each person. Individual differences are truly a blessing. Imagine how boring it would be if we were all the same. We'd all eat at Yang's and listen to the Rolling Stones.

- Focus on celebrating our accomplishments. Catch people doing the right thing. I know that we all are committed to doing our best and are successful the vast majority of the time. So let's focus on our successes and having high expectations for everyone. Expect everyone to do well as compared to the reverse. There is strong research support for the effectiveness of self-fulfilling prophecies or the Pygmalion Effect. I don't have time to go into detail but I would encourage you to look at Dov Eden's work.
- Focus on what's best for Siena and what's the best way to fulfill our mission. We need to continue to break down the silos and commit ourselves to making sure we focus first on helping others be successful. Basically, community members helping community members. Saints helping Saints.
- Love your neighbor as yourself! Again, the concept is very easy but the implementation is so difficult. We're instructed to love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul and mind and to love our neighbor as ourselves. As Jim Hunter so eloquently states, this is love the verb, love in action and not merely a feeling or emotion. We can demonstrate this love by being:
 - Patient
 - Kind
 - Humble
 - Respectful
 - Selfless
 - Forgiving
 - Honest
 - Committed

We also need to remind ourselves of our desire for excellence all the time. Over the door to my office is a sign that simply reads "Excellence in Every Interaction." Seeing it each time I leave my office helps to reinforce my desire for excellence. Candidly, there are many times I fall short but I hope I'm getting better each day. Also, I take accountability when I identify areas where I could do better and acknowledge the need to improve.

As I've said, it is so easy to work for and serve a community you love so much. We have accomplished so much and I am so proud of Siena. I also know that once we fully commit to excellence in every interaction, we will realize our vision and fulfill our potential.

Legendary football coach Vince Lombardi said "We will chase perfection, and we will chase it relentlessly, knowing all the while we can never attain it. But along the way, we shall catch excellence."

Join me in the chase for perfection, and with the blessed community of Siena Saints – let's catch excellence together. God Bless! It is a great day to be a Saint!