

Interviewee: John Ritschdorff
Interviewer: Gus Nolan

June 27, 2002
MHP

John Ritschdorff

Marist College

Poughkeepsie, NY

Transcribed by Erin Kelly

For the Marist College Archives and Special Collections

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Interviewee: John Thomas Ritschdorff

Interviewer: Gus Nolan

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Summary: In the following interview, Dr. John Ritschdorff reflects on his years at Marist College. Within the interview, Dr. Ritschdorff speaks of his teaching mathematics as well as an introductory computer course among other courses. Other roles that he has participated on throughout his years at Marist College include being elected as Chair of AAC working towards the adoption of the Core program from the sixty-sixty program, as well as his position as an Athletic Director. Dr. Ritschdorff also compares Marist students from the college's early years to the college's current students and describes the expansion of the campus in terms of both the physical grounds and the student population. The interview ends with Dr. Ritschdorff's thoughts on the direction of the college for the future.

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“BEGINNING OF INTERVIEW”

Gus Nolan: Good morning John.

John Ritschdorff: Hi Gus. [Laughter]

GN: Today is Thursday June 27th. We’re meeting with Dr. John Ritschdorff in the Archive room in the James Cannavino Library here at Marist College. The interview is part of the ongoing project for the Archives Department to gather as much information as we can of the early days and the beginning of Marist College. John, could you give us your full name please?

JTR: Sure. John Thomas Ritschdorff.

GN: Were you named after any member of the family?

JTR: No, I have no relatives with the same name.

GN: Where and when were you born?

JTR: I was born in 1947 at St. Francis Hospital in Chelsea, New York City in Manhattan.

GN: Are there any... You have any siblings, any brothers or sisters?

JTR: I have a younger brother, Robert who was born in 1952.

GN: And your parents, what was your father’s occupation?

JTR: My father had a few occupations. He went to, after getting out of the Navy, he went to college at night. It took him about twelve years. When he finally finished, he became a mechanical engineer for Coastman Instrument, which was a company. He designed aircraft instruments and later in his career, he was an expert on altimeters so if there were plane crashes, he would always testify about the veracity of the instrument...

GN: And your mother?

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JTR: If the plane was too low. He always said pilots crash planes, not instruments.

[Laughter] My mother was a waitress and then was a stay-at-home mom and then after my brother and I were in high school, she worked for Metropolitan Insurance Company on 23rd Street.

GN: And the names of your mother and father, John?

JTR: Joseph and Mary.

GN: In your early education, where did you go to grade school?

JTR: I went to St. Columbus Elementary School which is on West 25th Street in Manhattan. I attended PS147 and Sacred Heart School in Cambria Heights, Queens and then Archbishop Molloy High School in Jamaica, Queens.

GN: We'll get back to more of your life in high school then the Marist Brothers but let's move on a little bit to keep the biographical material together. When were you married?

JTR: I was married to JoAnn Valentino in October of 1971. We were married at Marist Chapel and so her family lived in Highland, New York and most of her family still does.

GN: Okay, let's go on to your high school and college? Where did you go to high school?

JTR: I went to Archbishop Molloy High School.

GN: For how long?

JTR: Four years.

GN: Oh, you graduated from Molloy?

JTR: I graduated from Molloy, yes. I didn't do the Junior Ed. I went from high school into the Novitiate.

GN: Okay, and the Novitiate was in Esopus?

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JTR: The Novitiate was in Esopus.

GN: Do you remember some of the staff there at the time? [Laughter]

JTR: Well, there was this Brother Gus Nolan [Laughter] who was the, I guess you called him a sub-master at that time. Did I tell you we called him assistant master? But you were here, by the way. You were on sabbatical for on the...

GN: Becoming more holy, yes.

JTR: Yes.

GN: Indeed. Yea, yea.

JTR: So I didn't have tremendous contact with you the first year but the second year, way back then. You also taught English, English Composition, which I taught with you. I remember the Master of Novices.

GN: And his name is?

JTR: I'm thinking. [Laughter]

GN: Peter Hillary?

JTR: Peter Hillary, yes. Yes, he went to Rome after we left. Oh, actually I just had you one year, Peter Hillary was just my first year and then you came my second year.

GN: And then after finishing your studies in Esopus, you moved on to Poughkeepsie to Marist College.

JTR: Came to Poughkeepsie in August of '66 and did two years here.

GN: While here, what were your particular areas of study?

JTR: I studied Mathematics because that was the major I had and my first interest and Physics. Physics was a major that was viable at that time.

GN: You had other interests at that time too if I recall?

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JTR: I spent a lot of time in musical performances. There was a group of ten of us that were a real mismatch at the beginning but we became quite good.

GN: You nearly gained national prominence.

JTR: We were on the verge of a recording contract in I think June of 1968 and as a group decided not to pursue it because we all had other interests. I was going to graduate school, I just had teaching assignments, I was doing other... You know, had other opportunities that they would like to try and pursue.

GN: Yea, and a contract of that sort would have made a commitment to do music.

JTR: It was... It would've been that we would have to have been available at least for a year to perform and tour.

GN: Well, let's move on to the graduate school then. Where did you go to graduate school and what were you studying?

JTR: I went to New York University. I studied Mathematics. I was assigned Christ the King High School so I lived at the school and I taught part-time at Christ the King and studied full-time at NYU.

GN: Okay, and then when did you returned to Marist to do such teaching?

JTR: I went to a funeral, the March of '70 in Esopus. I do not know, I do not recall who the person was but I was standing next to Kevin Carolan and Rich LaPietra. And they said, "Well, what're you thinking about doing in the future?" and I said "Well, you know, college teaching looks like a possibility." So they offered me a job.

GN: That's how jobs are...

JTR: They said, "We need you. We need you. Can you come in July?" I said, "Yea, I'll be there."

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GN: Okay.

JTR: And so that's how I got it.

GN: And that would be July of 1970?

JTR: July of 1970, yes.

GN: So you've been here thirty-two years?

JTR: On Sunday, it will be thirty-two years, yes.

GN: Very good. Let's say something more about your first assignments. When you came to teach here, was it primarily math that you were doing?

JTR: I had an opportunity when I was an undergraduate student to work on computers and Marist had in '67 acquired an IBM mainframe machine, real small. I mean there's probably in the tape recorder that I'm looking at... There's probably a more sophisticated chip and more computing power than [Laughter]... But definitely in the camera that's there. There's a lot more computing than that was in that machine. It was a little core machine but I learned how to write programs and actually Nilus Donnelly was the person who was in charge of the Computer Center in its first stages. And so I acquired an expertise in computing and then while I was at NYU I did some research work on programming languages and so I came back with the expectation or was hired with the expectation I would teach in Introductory Computing classes as well as Mathematics classes. My average class size was forty-two students. That's at that year. I had...

GN: You had five classes? [Laughter]

JTR: I had four classes, three day, one evening and I did two cap ones and I had two Introductory Computing classes.

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GN: You're a long time stay here, much to raise some questions to yourself along the way. Were you ever tempted to go somewhere else? Were there options that you were considering or were you just dropping them right there?

JTR: There were two points where I had options to go elsewhere in the mid-seventies, in 1974, '75. I tried to convince my wife to go to Idaho. I had an offer from the... The Department of Energy had just been formed in the early seventies and they had set up a research lab in Idaho looking for mathematicians.

GN: I'll have to thank JoAnn for staying here. [Laughter]

JTR: She said, "I will not go to Idaho." [Laughter] Actually, she didn't want to leave the Hudson Valley.

GN: Yea.

JTR: Okay, now it's a totally different story. I'm set and she would love to go down south. And then in '81 I had a sabbatical that I took in New York City and when that was finished, I had an offer to go out to Oakland into the Navy. I had done some consulting work as part of the sabbatical for the Navy and I had an offer to go work out at the Alameda Naval Air Station, which no longer exists.

GN: Okay.

JTR: It shut down about four years ago. In both cases my wife said, "No, we're staying here." [Laughter]

GN: Yes, we do want to thank JoAnn for having said that. [Laughter]

JTR: I occasionally was encouraged by graduate students that I had that IBM would be a perfect location for me. I never wanted to go for it.

GN: Okay.

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JTR: I don't if it was cultural or it is why I just, I enjoyed the separateness from it so I never, never pursued those opportunities.

GN: But back here at Marist then, you do take on specific roles that have really been significant for the college and its academic growth. I'm thinking now of your role as Chair of AAC and then the adoption of the core program. Maybe you'd address some comments to those?

JTR: Yea, I was... I don't know if I was fortunate but I used to win elections. I don't know if I still can today but I remember being elected to AAC. I didn't even have tenure yet. I got tenure while I was a member of AAC and major curriculum review was on the table and just I had... I walked into it and there were certainly others. Lou Zuccarello was the dean, Ed O'Keefe was I guess finished a term, was a very, still a very strong spokesman for curriculum reform but I got to make it happen.

GN: This was leaving the sixty-sixty behind?

JTR: This was leaving the sixty-sixty and going to a core program, which was a value based program that had all sorts of other requirements so it was a very, it was a very structured curriculum that required a lot of politicking and a lot of keeping areas happy and distribution balances in line.

GN: I remember some of those discussions and things.

JTR: We had some great discussions. [Laughter]

GN: Another area, you're probably the first that I recall interviewing on this next subject. You were a member of the Presidential Search Committee in '79?

JTR: That's correct. Jerry Cox, Tom Casey and I were the three faculty members that served on that search.

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GN: I only know of one person, the outcome of that. That's Dennis Murray now.

JTR: That's right, yes.

GN: Could you say that... Where else did you go or what was the nature of that search? Was it national? It must've been because they went to California.

JTR: That was, that was a national search. The trustees took it very, very seriously that they were going to try to encourage candidates from across the country. There were members of the team that traveled places. Tom Casey and I went to Florida for three days to association and government boards meetings to be with possible presidential candidates, people that were in presidencies who were there. Gary Smith, who was a trustee at the time and Tom, Tom Casey went out to California to drum up business and ran into Dennis Murray.

GN: How did Dennis Murray's name first surface? Do you recall that?

JTR: We had a consulting firm. It had just been formed. Stead and Ness were their names. One very eloquent and erudite senior person and then a young person who was just getting into the national education scene and they had formed a consulting firm and we had retained them. And someone at, I think it was Steven Hood who was the President of Cal State Long Beach at the time, who I think now is at UNLB had, you know, Dennis as a graduate student. He was a student and had put his name in and then Dennis got interested, came for an interview. We must have interviewed close to ten people.

GN: Interesting. I remember one of those interviews when he was coming but I think he was just about ready to take the position by the time other members of the faculty were seeing him and he was getting a look at who he had to deal with.

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JTR: Who he had to deal with.

GN: Yea. What should we...?

JTR: He didn't do it... He didn't do it up front. That we waited for. [Laughter]

GN: Until he had bitten on that hook that was there. Another interesting part of your career, as Chairman of the faculty for a good number of years and different capacities...

JTR: Yes.

GN: And stepping aside and saying, what would you say were some of the major problems that you had to deal with and what were some of the major accomplishments?

Is it with folks?

JTR: Each term was different.

GN: Yea, good.

JTR: My first term was [8-4-5?] and the biggest difficulty I encountered at that point was settling a contract. Those were... Marist was starting to come out of difficult times at that point and there was a strong administrative interest to rewrite the faculty handbook. That, you may have been part of. You may have been part of that. Tony Cernera...

GN: I recall something of that sort.

JTR: Had an assignment to that effect and so the handbook was being redone. The faculty contract was in a sense up for grabs so there's new ground is going to be broken on that. And both got done. The handbook got changed dramatically and we had a contract.

GN: David McCraw is a name that seems to come to mind.

JTR: Yes, he was definitely involved as well. That's right.

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GN: In terms of those.

JTR: Of course we had new student evaluation and faculty procedures that got established and he was the author of those, David proposed them. He was the author of those. He had a Chair in faculty first and then came.

GN: And then the second role, your second title?

JTR: '88, '89 was the starting point where I think some of the pain the institution's feeling now. In '88, '89, the faculty worked with the trustees and came to the conclusion that we were going to strongly increase our research and scholarship activities. Okay, we changed the criteria for promotion. We changed the criteria for receiving tenure and grandfathered everyone, which meant for six or seven years things stayed pretty dormant. So by the time we get to the, you know, 1996 or so, all of a sudden it's now going into effect. People that have been hired knew about it and now we're in full bloom so to speak with policies definitely in place. But those were the initial seeds. It was the changing of the, of the criteria for rank and the criteria for tenure with the additional emphasis being on scholarship.

GN: Right.

JTR: So time has changed the institution. I think I've seen it change the faculty dramatically. The faculty that we have here now is so much more qualified, prepared in terms of degrees, in terms of scholarly activities compared to ten years ago, compared to twenty or two.

GN: And part of that would have to be the overall success of the College to be able to afford these people, wouldn't that be? Or am I seeing this in a...?

JTR: Everyone can take credit for everything. [Laughter]

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GN: And it's...

JTR: Some would say that the changes led to the ability to enhance the reputation which led to the success.

GN: Chicken lay egg? [Laughter]

JTR: Respectively chicken, egg. I think it all sort of happened together and in comparison with other institutions, they experience very similar activities or similar developments, institutions that were like Marist. Other institutions that had well-established faculty positions and expectations, they stayed pretty constant. But schools such as ourselves, I think it might have increased our... Increased the quality of the faculty over those, over that ten year period. My last term was '95, '96 and at that point we re-did the academic organization. We had been divisionally organized since 1981 and in the reorganization of '95, '96, we went back to a departmental structure and again moved towards a school structure.

GN: What do you feel is the greatest rewards for ourselves of going to the school structure, having a school of communication, a school of business. Is it a convenient handle to be able to identify or is there a prestigious name involved in having a school rather than a department?

JTR: I think it has created just a more focused and correct identity for years. It's come with a price. I mean, when I started at Marist, there was sixty-two faculty. We all knew each other and ate together. We... We didn't do everything together but there was a lot of camaraderie and the difference now is that instead of the identity being focused as it was on that point on Marist College, it's now focused on my school. And we've lost some of the opportunities and interests to integrate across schools.

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GN: Yes, and the first, it was really in one building. There was a Donnelly building.

JTR: There was the Donnelly building.

GN: That served as the focus.

JTR: Yes.

GN: And the interpersonal aspects were much more convenient.

JTR: Because my first office I shared with four people.

GN: Good for camaraderie but not much for professionalism.

JTR: It was great for camaraderie. [Laughter] It worked, you know, you did with what you had. In fact Robert was one of my...

GN: Colleagues.

JTR: Yes, he was a Mathematics faculty member. Brother Maestro who was the Latin and group teacher.

GN: Right, yes.

JTR: He was part of the crew and then Linus Foy had an intern, Bill [Vermon] from SUNY Albany. He was the fourth. So it was interesting, it was interdisciplinary, it had connections to the president's office.

GN: Yes.

JTR: Having this, it was a nice way to start.

GN: But as you say, the actual development numerically now, we're more than twice that number on faculty or in administrators.

JTR: We're 178 faculty now so we're very close to three times that amount.

GN: Okay, and then adjuncts even proportionately more.

JTR: Adjuncts... Adjuncts, you could count probably on two hands.

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GN: In those days.

JTR: In those days.

GN: Yea. Alright, another aspect of your career here is in the athletics and sports and the NCAA. Give us an overview of this. What is your role and what do you do?

JTR: Okay, could I tell you how it came about and then I'll tell you the story...

GN: I'd love to hear that because you're not quite the athlete that I thought you were in college.

JTR: It was totally by accident. My claim to glory is as a high school level.

GN: Yes.

JTR: I came in second many, many times. I have a lot of second place trophies home for city championships and different tournaments because we always lost to Alcindor who became Jabbar.

GN: That's a name I...

JTR: But I played against him many, many times.

GN: Oh.

JTR: I knew basketball well. I've played in Madison Square Garden many times as a high school kid.

GN: In fact your first coming to Marist was by way of...?

JTR: It was with some basketball trip.

GN: Yes.

JTR: Yea. We played the Novices. We played over in the Esopus gym and on the way back, just drove through the campus. And Leo was just opened and there was talk about where Champagnat was going to go.

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GN: Wow, that's a long time ago.

JTR: And that's how they would impress me the most about Marist at that point. It was the fact that it was a college that was expanding, building. It looked nice.

GN: Yea.

JTR: It was new.

GN: Yea.

JTR: At that point it was relatively new. And then I did absolutely nothing with athletics for nineteen years. Okay, so in my early faculty days up until 1989, I had absolutely nothing to do with it. I think I went to one basketball game in all that time because I remember and remembered, it's a very self-serving statement, but I remember the high quality of play that I could see on the campus so we just didn't attract miracles.

GN: Yes, right.

JTR: And my high school games are more exciting and involved better athletes than I saw at the Super Dome. I had just finished my second term as Chair here in the faculty and that came with it a service sabbatical and so I had no assignment in 1989. I'm in the parking lot at Lowell Thomas and Mark vanderHayden catches up to me, puts his arm around me and says "They need help down in athletics. You're in need to keep up. Would you give it a shot?" And I said "Well, how did my name come up? I'm staying away from this sort of..." [Laughter] An old high school classmate who I did not remember, Gene Doris, was named Athletic Director that summer and he knew me. I didn't know him. And he said "I'd like to work with him" so I had to go reintroduce myself to Gene because I had no idea who he was and that's how that started. It started really to just do two things. One was to help their academic advisement efforts. Okay,

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they had to change our personnel. They had a graduate just out of Penn State who was very unsure of what she was... What she could do, should do. The coaching staffs were overrunning her a little bit because she felt somewhat intimidated by them. So they, they wanted to solve that immediate problem but I think in the long term, he wanted to just establish athletics as a more respected and more integral part of just the entire Marist and its offerings. We had come off a major violation so there were problems within athletics and within its position of respect with the rest of the community and so one thing led to another.

GN: Are there seminars or conferences for NCA representatives?

JTR: Yes.

GN: Or do you just learn this as you...?

JTR: It's... There are three or at that time, there were three different things that would take place. There was always an annual seminar that pertained to just rules of compliance and typically a good portion of that had to do with academic performance and academic rules and so I would go to those. The faculty reps have a national organization called the Faculty Athletic Rep Association...

GN: Okay.

JTR: Which is funded by the NCAA and they have national conferences annually and then they have summer meetings. I found them to be the most boring [Laughter] and not very worthwhile. I went to two or three and said no [Laughter] because there were two different groups. There were the high-roller big-time players and then there was everybody else. And they will never talk to you so...

GN: Numerically, how many would there be? Do all the major...?

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JTR: One hundred to two hundred. Okay, they're... At the divisional level, there are three hundred faculty reps and one hundred of them are called 1A schools, which are your large football schools. Georgetown is not a 1A schools, it sounds like us. It went down the ladder. But like University of Florida and Notre Dames, you know, Cal State and they live a different life and they have different problems. What is fascinating, however, is just the brand-new fields that people come from. I remember being in Chicago at one of these at one of the workshops and next to me was a fellow from the University in Miami, who was a vascular surgeon. He worked at their medical school...

GN: I see.

JTR: But he was their faculty rep. So he's there and he's reading through medical charts while the things going on, catching up on his work. There were a lot of lawyers, people from law school that are, that are there. And then you have your people who are interested in advisory types of things so the educators, psychology faculty, very few mathematicians. I never met another mathematician. [Laughter]

GN: When you come back to home here, your major function it would be kind of articulating the policy of students and the academics, when they can and can not be exempted from class for instance or taking of exams? There are policy statements that say you have to...?

JTR: It took a few years to generate them. I mean, the type of things I do is I was always involved in the certifying eligibility. So I was the person who reviewed someone's academic record, athletic record and say yes, no. They could, they could not. If there were any questions about rule interpretations, I would be a resource to do that. The NCAA, as an organization comprised of members gets itself into a lot of strange

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areas and they have a lot of academic policies for instance “To a member of the institution, you must...”

GN: Yes.

JTR: And so I would be the person who would help translate that requirement into what would become a Marist policy. So they say you must have a policy that deals with conflicts between classes and competitions. So it took Marist about three years to develop one and it went to the Academic Affairs Committee faculty. They have policies about conflicting times between exams and competitions that that has to be done at a higher level. So each policy went by the academic vice-president, approves any competition during reading day or... And we get maybe one or two a year and using its tournaments. Usually it's being invited someplace where it's in the best interest of the institution to be there or to seize the opportunity that's presented. They say it's put in place to make sure that the academic side of the house has control over those even though it's an athletically scheduled event, they can decide whether we pass the ballot to decide whether it goes or not and being supportive of athletics operations, you try to make everything work and so you decide to just put things in place or make arrangements for special events that will go. For example, the women's basketball team I think in '94 or '95 got invited to Alaska into a five day tournament in Alaska, which was a tremendous opportunity. You get some national exposure. It's a great trip. It happened during final exam week unfortunately and we were able by working with faculty about three months ahead of time by means of faxing and fed-exing and all sorts of things, students took most of their exams on time. We rented a hotel room and it was ten o'clock on campus. It was six am there. All the students took the exams at six am.

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GN: At six am, interesting.

JTR: We had students taking exams on airplanes, in airports and it worked. The beauty of it is it worked. Every faculty member was satisfied. Every student took the correct and proper exam and the athletic event would go on.

GN: I would presume they weren't all satisfied, the students that is, on some of these arrangements but it was better than nothing. [Laughter]

JTR: It was, in some cases, the choice of not going so that...

GN: Would I be right...?

JTR: They quickly saw the value.

GN: Would I be right in assuming that as complicated as this is, each would be the financial aspects of this scholarship money, who can come and who can not in terms of where the scholarships, who could qualify for the scholarships?

JTR: I've kept my sanity by staying out of that.

GN: I see.

JTR: It was financial aid and I think Marist has been very smart to make sure that all financial aid decisions and admissions decisions get made in admissions and then financial aid. Are there incentives for certain people to come? Certainly but most athletics programs are well-funded and the understanding of that funding is pretty widespread. Okay, so it's not a matter of all of a sudden everybody starts brushing their hands over how much does a particular student get. That's usually done often before this student even applies to the school. That sort of recruiting activity takes place after the junior year and usually a student knows very well by means of a written offer what's possible if they got accepted.

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GN: Good.

JTR: And I fortunately get to stay at it.

GN: Well, you've... You've been blessed with certain wisdom, I must admit.

JTR: There are times you get lucky, [Laughter] that's right. That's right.

GN: Coming back to other roles that you've had or as a faculty Chair, you had the opportunity to attend board meetings and things of this sort.

JTR: Yes.

GN: And I would... I'd just put this in terms of the development of the College, I know one small story in terms of the buildings and the development of the buildings. Lowell Thomas was really a mistake and as much as it wasn't really supposed to go up but the fire department closed down the school, the classrooms on the other side and Western Printing. I mean, we had been too long in violation or something and suddenly we had to put up a new classroom building but it really was supposed to be a dormitory. It was supposed to be a Physics building or it was supposed to be something else going up. I can imagine you have sat at some board meetings where building decisions were made that would be an interesting tour and I was just wondering if anything like that comes to mind?

JTR: These days I sit on the Building and Grounds Committee so I could tell you very current interesting stories about things. What would happen at a trustee meeting and then most trustee meetings were run in this fashion, that there was a public portion and then a private portion. And what would be discussed at the public portion would be prepared announcements, prepared statements. It really was through much open debate or discussion that usually by the time it reached the public meeting that things were, things

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were pretty much in place. The big expansion... Then I first started going to trustee meetings in '84 and then so McCann had been built. We were in the process of putting up lots of residence halls and so the townhouses had been built. My first exposure is when Gartland Commons goes up. And those are always discussed and explained as being self-liquidating investments because of the fact that you can borrow from the state at reasonable interest, potential income pays off the note. You just...

GN: All free?

JTR: Not all free but that...

GN: But it's...

JTR: Very balanced, it's balanced.

GN: Yea, yea.

JTR: Okay, academic buildings are another matter altogether because academic buildings, unless you expand dramatically don't break the bank.

GN: Okay.

JTR: And this was always the difficulty in getting the library done. The library was renovated in '74 and probably from 1980 on, there was an interest in putting up a library and it was talked about regularly during the eighties at trustees meetings and was something, well we need a donor, we need funding, we need a lot more. The building that I think you refer to in the question you asked was not Lowell Thomas, it was Dyson building because we were across the street from '84 until '90 and Dyson opened in '90. We had to get out.

GN: Right.

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JTR: Because late eighties we were still across the street. The reason I remember that is I remember standing on the street corner next to Rick Smith.

GN: Oh, yes.

JTR: And it was... He graduated in '88 and he just finished his senior year [Laughter] across so I knew we were still across the street. Dyson got built because we needed classrooms and the basement of Lowell Thomas got finished. That basement in Lowell Thomas was supposed to be at the front left end. It had twenty-five foot ceilings and wide open spaces, no pillars.

GN: Yes.

JTR: So it was built so it could have been but the space was needed and so classrooms and offices went down.

GN: That's interesting.

JTR: In fact I have something I'll give to the Archives. If you don't have it, I have the original hardbound proposal for the Lowell Thomas Center that dates like to 1982 or '83, which is a... The way it... To me it was going to be very much performing arts there. There was a theater that was part of it. There were different layouts so it has some sketches and sites.

GN: Yes, I remember Dr. Lanning playing a role in that. I was surprised to see that somehow the theater didn't get to where he thought it was going to be.

JTR: Do you want to know how I picked out...came across this? A good friend of mine, Natalie Lauren went to a garage sale at Bob Norman's house and he was selling stuff and she bought it for a quarter.

GN: Wow. [Laughter]

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JTR: Bob Norman was a former Communications professor. [Laughter]

GN: We've interviewed him here.

JTR: So he went around with... I have all of his archives in my house. [Laughter]

GN: Moving on and talking about the College and its development, would you address some comments to the student body and the student body in terms of a contrast, when you were here as a student, the demands that were made on you versus today. What kind of demands can we make on students? Is there a big contrast? And then of course, maturity, scholarship, the balance of the male and the female?

JTR: Okay. I thought when I was a student, students were very highly motivated. It was all male at the time and the biggest motivator was the selective services. The draft was there, you chose your career carefully, you made sure you got into it and made sure you could get into graduate school. I think students that were here also came here to become teachers. Education was a very big program and so there was just a level of things you had to get done. When I left the College went co-ed. When I came back it had I think its second year of resident women students. That numbered like five percent of the student body so it was a real... It'd be two floors of Champagnat, that was it. And that changed I think the... It began to change some of the attitudes and conventions of the College but not all that much. In terms of student abilities, I got to be real careful who I actually talk to and when they graduated, I thought they declined after I came here as a faculty member, very gradually and I think bottomed out around 1979, at which time they began to increase very gradually. I've always said that Marist students weren't going to change that much and that within a different group that there's a certain type of person that's attracted here and as a group they tend to, while having unique identities, don't

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necessarily need to... Remember this is with different classes. You contrast the class of '92 with the class of '84, I mean it's no difference to me. Students tend to be... I use the word passive a lot because I think they are and compared to students I encountered in New York University which were very aggressive students. Marist students and the classroom administration by the chart are somewhat passive, tend to be of good character, tend to be personable and tend to wake up just in time to be successful. It's like something magical happens along the way that you can tell a freshman becomes a junior become a senior. How it happens, when it happens or the things you do or that the college does to make it happen, I haven't been able to put my finger on it. The past five years I've seen the quality of students decrease dramatically. I teach an introductory Statistics course. I typically have sixty, seventy percent of the classes with first year students. Students now have skill sets. There are things I can say, they nod, I know they know and we move on. There are places I used to get bogged down and have to go over in review and I don't have to do that anymore. So I've seen just in terms of preparation of students, they improved.

GN: Now were you... Are you as familiar with the teaching of Computer Science students and Math students, are they on the same, in your frame of reference? Are Math students more your area of concentration or Computer Science students?

JTR: Actually, I taught the more... Neither, the general purpose student.

GN: Okay. Yea, I was wondering whether students come here with for instance, a background in computers, that already notched up to be able to move with greater facility in the computer field whereas the mathematics, if they were just using trigonometry and...

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JTR: No, I... There's really three groups of students we're talking about. Computer students, I find for the most part have a very rude awakening when they arrive on campus because they discover that computing is a science and that's how they teach it. They're used to computer games. They're used to networks. They're used to Internet. They're used to a whole variety of things and they become very computer literate and very computer capable but they have not begun to breach the science at all. So they used a tool. It's like someone who's a real good driver doesn't make them an automotive engineer. You can be a real great driver and have no idea what's going on under there. If you want to automotive engineer or automotive technician, well you got to... So that for many, that's a rude awakening.

GN: Good point, yes.

JTR: Students that major in Mathematics tend to have got themselves into advanced placement classes or it... Rarely does a student who has only had three years of high school Mathematics say that's my major. I want to go there. And Marist has administered placement tests for years to try make sure a student starts at the right level. So we don't find students making poor choices. They tend to be prepared for the class that they start with. The past ten years or so, I've spent most of my teaching for first year general students, students who take courses that are required by their major. So they need the math majors or computer majors and they're the students to which I'm saying that their skill sets have improved, that our general student who's majoring in Social Science or English or Management is a much better prepared student.

GN: Good. Yet another area of your view on how things have changed. You're familiar with the two most recent presidents, President Foy and President Murray.

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JTR: Yes.

GN: Would you say something about the administration of each in terms of the general characteristics and how you see them.

JTR: I've had the honor and privilege of knowing both of them very well. When I was a student here, Linus Foy taught. He taught me advanced Calculus. I had him for a year. He also introduced me to computing. He also got me a fellowship to New York University, which was his own love. So I had greater affinity for Linus Foy. Working with him my first nine years here I thought he was the perfect person to help let people create a viable college, that there was no cookie-cutter bottle that he brought in and said here's what you follow, here's what you do. It was rather the faculty themselves were able as a group to see what they wanted to do, how they wanted to do it, what sort of programs they wanted to pursue and he was a great supporter. I think he realized that colleges were changing and near the end of his presidency didn't want to be part of it and this is just my own personal impression that his idea of being a college president was in a different environment. The needs of the institution have become different. There was a greater need for fundraising. There was a greater need for more stringent management principles and those things reached a point where I think he realized this was just not... It wasn't the same place because he's allowed it to grow and nurtured it and now he's ready to let go.

GN: An interesting paradox.

JTR: There's a real parental notion after all he oversaw development and enabled the body of the college to function in a much more independent professionally and then had to separate himself. Dennis Murray comes. I think he typifies youth and energy. He's a

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real good risk-taker. He's a real good risk-taker, has a great knack of landing on his feet, making the right things happen. There were times especially in the early eighties when we were trying to recover our financial base and begin to expand that he just would say we just had to do it so we're going to do it. He built the new townhouses for example. We had reached a point at the end of the Foy era where we were very skiddish about doing any building. McCann...

GN: Was nice.

JTR: Cost a fortune. It was the last major building and had repercussions. Nationwide, there were difficulties in colleges and universities in the late seventies but ours focused more on the McCann part of it. Dennis Murray comes on the scene. The first thing he wants to do is he wants to build more residence halls and everyone's like, "How could you... how could we do it?" We'll never attract the students because we had the high enrollments. We actually cut back one year in terms of personnel. I remember we were even letting four or five faculty go in 1978 and how could we possibly expand over this instance... How are we going to...? But we built the residence halls and the students came and then we re-did revenue and guess what? The students came and then we kept building and the students kept coming.

GN: Build it, they'll come.

JTR: It almost has that sense to it.

GN: Yea.

JTR: And I said that very early or earlier in our conversation. When I first stepped on campus, that's what made this place interesting to me. Things were being built.

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GN: Good. We're running on on time but I want to get a few more ideas from you.

From your own perspective, what would you say were your major contributions here and what were some things that didn't happen that you wish did happen?

JTR: I think when all said and done my major contribution at Marist was that I could take a complicated core system, that I could be a stabilizing influence on a lot of good things that were going on and bring them to fruition. I look and we've spoke about most of them because most of them came when I was in leadership position with faculty committees, getting a core program, emphasizing an interest in values based education, having faculty expand their role to more scholarly activities and research activities, being able to help units recognize their identity is something else I was part of a personally, being able to have a scholarship requirement. Those are the things that I see I've done. Athletically, I'm not quite sure what I've done. I may have made their life more difficult for them, [Laughter] maybe not be as positive at that of what I've done. I think what I will look back on my athletics connection days as being as I also brought stability and integrity to the program. The program does it worse if not being legit or an honest program if not as it is. It still has problems. We still have infractions but we find out about them and we do something about them. It's not the big surprise that "Oh my goodness, what has happened to us?" My regrets I think are that when we went to schools we lost some curricular collaborations that existed. I think from a faculty perception in terms of scholarship and development, it was the right choice but in terms of curriculum developments, it hasn't been. Where prior to that there was a lot more sharing of requirements and a lot more sharing of instruction and it's become much more isolated which may be a nationwide thing. We wanted accreditation and Management

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school will not get accredited with mathematicians teaching their quantitative methods courses.

GN: Yea.

JTR: Even though they probably could do them better. The fact is it was the wrong...

GN: Wrong combination.

JTR: Okay and so I think those are some of the things we've lost by our growth and by our expansion but I find that... Everyday I come to work and I just marvel at what a nice place it is to work at.

GN: And what about the future?

JTR: I drive down that river and the river's always different and it's... It's just I'm very comfortable with that and I just say this is going to be okay.

GN: And looking into the future, what do you think is the next ten years going to be for Marist? Will distance learning play a major role or will we camouflage our position here in the Hudson Valley?

JTR: Oh, it's real difficult to predict the future. I wish I could. Distance learning will have a role. It will never be our primary role. It's a good source of revenue if you can get the right programs and the right students. And if we have good corporate support, I mean we can do that well and that can be something we're meant for. I think we're just going to keep growing. We're just going to get bigger. In the process we'll get better and we'll make more of an impact just because of our presence.

GN: Is there anything I didn't ask you that you'd like to say? Is there anything about Marist College? [Laughter]

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JTR: Yes, yes. [Laughter] I'd like to go back to my days as a student and early days as a faculty member. Marist College was built upon the principle of service and on a similar meeting that we had with Lou Zuccarello about sort of Marist processing education that Gandhi talked about. You came here because you had a vocation even if you weren't a Marist Brother. You came here because you were committed to something and willing to do something about it. And I remember when I was a student here, some days I drove a garbage truck. I drove around and my assignment was emptying all the public receptors because we didn't have a maintenance staff. We couldn't afford our own maintenance and so student Brothers did that. I remember in my early years there were always service days and service activities college-wide that students would engage in. But we were always expected to play a major service role. There were always jobs to be done on campus and the community. I've seen that wave. I've seen our students rise to the occasion and do some wonderful things but not as many as perhaps would have in the past. I've seen faculty and administration have become much less service oriented. It has to do with scholarship. There's no doubt it has to do with... There's so much time in the day and so you...

GN: Yea, yea.

JTR: But that's the one thing you didn't ask me about.

GN: Okay.

JTR: It's just my memories of the school as being one that's very much attuned to services. Service is a... There's a scenic moment that's there.

GN: Good.

JTR: You want to join our community, you buy into that.

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GN: Good. Thank you John.

JTR: Gus, it's been wonderful.

“END OF INTERVIEW”