

Preserving the Legacy of The College of New Rochelle

President Hall's Vision Endures

In the fall of 2018, for students at The College of New Rochelle (CNR), their future was uncertain. After years of struggling to right a foundering ship, the institution's leadership announced that The College of New Rochelle had to close its doors.

Yet by the time that day arrived in the summer of 2019, new hope had dawned for the 115-year-old liberal arts college. Mercy College had entered into an agreement with CNR, with 1,800 students continuing their academic programs at Mercy, including 300 newly accepted first-years. In making the announcement, Mercy President Tim Hall emphasized the prime objective of the carefully constructed agreement: to enable as many students as possible to continue their college journey with minimal disruption at their new educational home. From the beginning of the transition, the phrase "Two colleges, one guiding principle," was coined.

The solution spelled relief not only for CNR students in the midst of their studies, but also for thousands of CNR alumni who wondered what would happen to their shared history and values, and to the opportunities to connect with familiar people and places. At the time of CNR's closing and migration to Mercy, some feared these important elements might be lost.



Such thoughts were had by Eileen Niedzwiecki CNR SAS '72, who turned her worry into action. As a former member of the CNR administration, she had served in key roles in advancement and alumni relations. Niedzwiecki was included in a task force of colleagues from both CNR and Mercy that began to sort through and manage the myriad details involved in transitioning CNR students, faculty and alumni to Mercy College. And while she expected cooperation, what she witnessed went much deeper. "From the very beginning, I saw how fortunate CNR was to have a partner whose own mission was so closely aligned with ours," she said.

At scores of meetings that often lasted late into the night, the transition team hammered out the financial and academic details of the agreement. "It was an intense time," Niedzwiecki recalled. "Yet in all our negotiations, President Hall never walked away from the table. And there was never any question that the two schools were in complete alignment of their mission."

The task of nurturing and supporting CNR's thousands of alumni from multiple decades and ushering them into the Mercy fold required diplomacy

and careful consideration. At the time of closing, Mercy hired Niedzwiecki to implement the transition. When she retired in 2021, a search to fill the role left no doubt that it was tailor-made for Tara Alfano CNR SAS '02, GS '04, former director of alumni relations and annual giving at New York Medical College, who was hired as director of CNR Development at Mercy College.

"At first many alumni were hesitant of the agreement, but they recognized the partnership with Mercy could sustain the alumni community," Alfano said. "They were genuinely excited about seeing all their former classmates. Engagement increased. That told me a lot about alumni loyalty to CNR and their deep need to remain connected."

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Marlene Malone Tutera CNR SAS '71, who served on the CNR Council and on its governing board during the transition, and who is now a member of Mercy's Board of Trustees,



CNR Alumni and President Hall gather in the CNR Alumni Room at Moller House

concurrent. “Our number one priority was always the students. But equally important was providing a way for CNR alumni to stay connected — not only with staff support but also providing a place to gather and call home,” she said.

Though the ensuing few months of pandemic restrictions put a damper on in-person gatherings of the new alliance, Mercy developed creative ways for alumni to engage virtually, while continuing to prepare for a future that would eventually include meeting face-to-face. Mercy also established a CNR alumni room at Moller House, its new administrative

office located in Tarrytown, and the Board of Trustees created the Mercy College CNR Legacy Award to be presented at their annual gala. The CNR Alumni Council was resurrected to become the CNR Legacy Council at Mercy College, and the CNR Legacy Scholarship was established, which to date has raised over \$100,000.

“Alumni who visit Moller House have expressed how thankful they are for all that Mercy has done to protect CNR student pathways as well as the CNR legacy,” Alfano said. “In opening its doors to alumni, Mercy opened its arms in welcome.”

“Mercy not only did everything possible to support CNR students, but they also provided just the right kind of events and thoughtful gestures that would draw alumni into the fold,” added Niedzwiecki.

Perhaps most meaningful to CNR alumni was Mercy’s decision to elect Tutera, a distinguished and admired CNR leader, to serve on Mercy’s Board of Trustees. “Mercy proved its commitment through these important gestures, which signal the fulfillment of a promise made,” said Tutera. “In return, the CNR alumni community has responded with excitement, service and support.”