

Every Era Has Its End: President Hartford to Retire in June 2011

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On February 8, 2010, Dr. Maureen Hartford announced to the Meredith College community that she planned to conclude her tenure as Meredith's seventh and first female president in June of 2011 after 12 years of service. Amongst the questioning college community, she graciously granted The Herald an interview to talk about her decision.

There have been many rumors and speculations about why Hartford decided that 2010-2011 would be the right time for her to step down. The first thing most students, faculty, and staff want to know is, why now? Hartford's response is level-headed and logical: "The timing just seemed to make sense. Whether by intent or by accident, we have a whole set of activities that are coming to fruition at the same time: the apartments opening, the opening of the chateau in Sansepolcro, accreditation of the Business School, reaccreditation of the whole institution, and the beginning of the next big strategic plan for the college. I came into Meredith just as a strategic plan was being completed so that I could take that and run with it, and I thought it would be a nice gift for the next president to do the same thing, but to have the grunt work finished so that she or he could put the final touches on it with the Board of Trustees. Meanwhile, the

Board can be thinking about where they want the institution to go in the next five or six years and be looking specifically for the skills they need to have in a president in order to get the college there."

When asked what she considers her greatest accomplishment to date as president of Meredith, Hartford responds, "In the greater scheme, I think it's increasing every kind of diversity on this campus: geographic, religious, ethnic, and national, and with that, getting our students to think about the world in different ways and getting them out into the world in different ways, including through study abroad." When asked to identify the greatest challenge she has faced throughout her 12-year tenure, she claimed that it was never having enough human, financial, or facility resources to do all that she wanted to do for the school. "I think this past year has been the absolute worst, given what has happened in the world economy," Hartford states matter-of-factly, "and as a result, our diminishing endowment has negatively impacted our ability to fund scholarships and faculty development. At the same time our donors are finding it more difficult to give so that we would increase those endowments. Overall, I think people are feeling less like taking risks." Despite the budget deficits,



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however, Hartford recently sent out a personal statement in a campus-wide email, in which she said that leaving an 18-month window to finish out her presidential term was a strategic choice that would allow her to bring in two planned surplus budget years for the college before she left. When questioned if she already had specific ideas as to how to accomplish this goal without further limiting educational resources, Hartford responded: "We're in the process of looking at every single thing we do on campus and saying, 'If we didn't do this, what else could we do?' One reason we're coming up with a planned surplus is that we already cut a lot of things. Now we're talking about how to keep that going, but also how to replace some of the things which we shouldn't have to keep cutting, such as no raises for faculty and staff, and no contributions to their retirement. It's time to say, 'What makes the most sense for us to do, and what could we afford not to do?' It will be challenging, but at the same time really healthy for the institution."

Hartford hopes that her successor will keep Meredith financially strong, build up its graduate

programs, and continue to increase the endowment for financial aid each year. "I think that's a critical player in keeping the institution accessible for bright women of all economic backgrounds," she reasons. When asked whether she had a preference for the gender of her successor. "Oh YES!!" she laughs heartily, then says in a more serious tone, "I think the institution has to do a totally open search and find the best-qualified person, but I think there is a powerful message out there about finding a strong woman. Certainly most of our sister women's colleges in the country have found strong women to lead, and when you look at the percentage of women in various levels of higher education administration and the number of women coming out of schools with doctorates, it's a really rich pool to choose from (Continued in Campus Life section on page 4)

IN THIS ISSUE...

National & International: Palin for Power?, Toyota Recalls, Costa Rica Elects Female President

Arts & Entertainment: A Woman's Point of View

Campus Life: Ragazze Americane, Look Up!, Madame CJ Walker

Science & Technology: Blogging Your Way Forward

Sports: 2010 Winter Olympics: Let the Games Begin!

Opinion: Reverse Culture-Shock, Censorship

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