

TEXT OF THE INTRODUCTORY ADDRESS delivered by **PROFESSOR G.T. WRIXON**, Vice-Chancellor of the University, President, University College Cork - National University of Ireland, Cork on 25th April, 2002, in St. Patrick's Hall, Dublin Castle, on the occasion of the conferring of the Degree of Doctor of Laws, *honoris causa*, on **DERVILLA MAURA XAVIER DONNELLY**

A Sheansailéir, agus a mhuintir na hOllscoile,

Professor Dervilla Donnelly stands out as being truly exceptional amongst her generation. During her distinguished career she has managed to combine different scientific disciplines, mixed science with other disciplines and has worked with an eclectic mix of people across numerous international partnerships and committees. Enthusiasm, energy and good humour have been the keys to success for Professor Donnelly, who amongst many other honours was the first woman president of the Royal Dublin Society.

Dervilla was born in Dublin City, one of three girls, each of whom has achieved great success in her chosen profession. Dervilla attended the Sacred Heart Convent School, Dublin, where the emphasis was on languages, not science. One day pupils only spoke French, another day German, and another day Irish. This training in languages has stood her in good stead since. However, the lack of science at the school became a problem, when she decided during her final year at school that she wanted to matriculate in chemistry as she was considering pharmacy as a career.

Since her school had no laboratory she studied chemistry theory privately for a year before matriculating. On being awarded a first in chemistry from UCD she embarked on a PhD. Also in UCD in flavonoid chemistry under the direction of the late T.S. Wheeler, and then like so many eminent Irish academics, went to the US to carry out post-doctoral research. She was based at UCLA with Ted Gleissman. Following this she took up a post at UCD but after a short time went to Sweden and France to gain extra additional international experience.

There she studied wood chemistry, which has remained a lifelong passion. Back in Dublin her applied research was of major economic value to the country and her work brought about a number of major international collaborations. During her university career, Dervilla's research formed part of a multidisciplinary study tied into the complex world of forestry where destabilisation of the forest ecosystems was occurring. Believing that multidisciplinary knowledge of the ecological phenomenon is crucial to successful control she developed and managed an academic research network in Europe in the 70's.

The network spread to other continents; USA, South Africa, South America and these exciting collaborations resulted in 150 papers and review articles and 85 PhD students. Of equal importance, the research results have had profound implications for the work of the forestry industry in Ireland and internationally. During this period she acted as President of the Phytochemical Society of Europe (the only woman to date) and Vice-President of Society of Chemical Industry in the UK (again, the only woman to date), and a member of Council of the Royal Society of Chemistry. In recognition of her research she holds honorary doctorates from University of Nottingham, The Queen's University Belfast and Trinity College Dublin. She currently works on appointments boards both as Chairman or Board Member for Professorships in Sweden, Switzerland, UK, Hungary, South Africa and Ireland. Her experience of science policy and its impact on research and education is extensive both nationally and internationally.

The importance of her contribution to the development of science in Ireland has been

recognised many times by the Government and she has been the Irish representative on numerous international delegations. She has been a Board Member of the National Board for Science and Technology (1978-1983); a Member of the Science and Technology Innovation Council (2001); Chairman of the European Science Research Council Committee (1985-90); Vice President and Executive Council member of the European Science Foundation (1990-1997) and Chairman of the ESF Network Committee. She was appointed by the Minister for Education to chair the National Education convention in 1994 and the Forum on Early Childhood Education in 1998.

The Taoiseach appointed her as Executive Chairman with responsibility for the development of Phase II the International Financial Services Centre, which was completed in April 1997 and proved exceptionally successful, returning 400 million Euro per annum to the Exchequer. She was appointed by the Minister for Education and Science to The Irish Council for Science, Engineering and Technology.

In September 2000 she was appointed to the Austrian Council for Science and Technology. She is currently leading the Commission for Assisted Human Reproduction at the request of the Minister for Health. She acts as consultant to numerous multinational companies and is an educational Trustee of Swords/Squibb Linson as well as being a Governor of the Irish Times Trust and Director of the Irish Times Limited. She is also on an Advisory Board of the Environmental Protection Agency, and on the Advisory Board of the Salvation Army regarding their property development. Her list of honours is extensive.

The Royal Irish Academy elected Dervilla to membership in 1968 and she served as Senior Vice-President and Vice-President on two occasions. In the Millennium year the President of University College Dublin awarded her the Charter Day medal and in 2001 she was honoured by a Fellowship of the Hibernian Academy. In 1995 the President of Ireland on the nomination of the Taoiseach appointed her as Chair of the Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies and she is currently in the process of revitalising and regenerating this important body.

Achievement is the order of the day for Dervilla, however, she modestly points out that "I have achieved nothing by myself. My achievements have been the ability to work with others and to join with others". Dervilla clearly thrives on the challenges of both her research and her committee work. But how does such a dynamic person relax? Dervilla enjoys gardening and the occasional round of golf.

Golf would have become more of a passion but for the fact, early in her career the only day off that Dervilla had was on Saturday, which was at that period a golfing day exclusively for men. Dervilla has a golden rule: "that one day a week I don't do any chemistry, and every Saturday you'll find me at a race-course somewhere in the State". Dervilla and her sister have a share in several horses and say "we only need one more leg to have a complete animal!"

PRAEHONORABILIS CANCELLARIE, TOTAQUE UNIVERSITAS:

Praehonorabilis Cancellarie, praesento vobis, hanc meam filiam quam scio tam moribus quam doctrina habilem et idoneam esse quae admittatur, honoris causa, ad gradum Doctoratus in utroque Jure, tam Civili quam Canonico, idque tibi fide mea testor ac spondeo totaeque Academiae.