



TEXT OF THE INTRODUCTORY ADDRESS DELIVERED BY: **DR MICHAEL MURPHY**, President, University College Cork on 20 September 2007, on the occasion of the conferring of the Degree of Doctor of Laws, *honoris causa*, on **MARGARET HEFFERNAN**



A Sheánsailéir, a mhuintir na hOllscoile agus a dhaoine uaisle, Margaret Heffernan was born in Cork in 1942, the eldest of six children of Ben and Nora Dunne. Two years later, in March 1944 her father opened his first clothing shop in Patrick Street, Cork. This was the start of the retail phenomenon which became known as Dunnes Stores and is today Ireland's largest private retailer. Probably everyone in Ireland has shopped for food in Dunnes Stores and worn a St Bernard or a Dunnes Stores labeled garment.

Margaret left school at 14 to join the family business, where she has remained to this day. Since the early 1990's, together with her brother Frank, Margaret has been responsible for the leadership and direction of Dunnes Stores, and, in that time, the company has experienced enormous growth and transformation.

Today, it is not only Ireland's leading retailer, but also one of the country's largest employers. The Dunnes Stores business encompasses 166 stores in Ireland (North and South), the United Kingdom and Spain, employing 20,000 people. Margaret Heffernan is justifiably proud of the fact that it is an Irish company and will continue as a family business through the Dunne, Heffernan and McMahon families.

Whilst heavily involved in all aspects of the business, it is in the area of textiles that Margaret has been most influential. Visitors to Dunnes Stores these days inevitably remark on the complete transformation in the clothing on display and the quality of fashion items and soft furnishings which can be purchased at highly competitive prices. The guiding principles of the company, clearly evident on its web home page are "to provide its customers with a choice of good quality products at competitive prices" – or encapsulated in its famous motto "Better value".

Those who know Margaret professionally, describe her as an astute business woman who is exceptionally intelligent, quick witted, energetic and passionate about Dunnes Stores. Margaret's other real passion is her family; she has been happily married for 40



years to Dr Andrew Heffernan. They have four children, two of whom are currently involved with the business, together with their cousin Sharon McMahon. Margaret and Andrew also have six grandchildren. Margaret has a keen interest in horse racing and she is an honorary member of the Irish Turf Club.

While today's honour is more than amply justified by her tremendous success in the world of business, it would have been merited otherwise by her contribution to Irish society through personal philanthropy, and the promotion of philanthropy among the Irish business community. Margaret founded the People in Need Trust in May 1988 with the purpose of raising and distributing money to charitable organizations throughout the country, with a special emphasis on helping the smaller, lesser known charities. A key condition is that the money raised in a particular county must go back in grants to organizations in that county. In this way, the money raised always stays locally. Through the successful RTE Telethon, the trust has raised €35 million to date and is one of the few non-government independent funds operating in the Republic of Ireland. She will be pleased by my mentioning the next telethon which takes place in October!

She has also been active, and personally generous, in support of education and research. In the early 1980's, three professors of medicine at UCD had a vision to establish a centre of education and research at St Vincent's Hospital. They approached Margaret, who not only supported the concept with a generous personal donation but also spearheaded the campaign to raise the necessary funding from a range of private donors. The Education and Research Centre was opened in the early 1990's with a mission to increase our understanding and treatment of important diseases, enhancing opportunities for the career development of Irish medical researchers, while, at the same time, facilitating improved care of patients in the hospital.

Margaret was also a key fundraiser for many years for the Diabetes Centre in St Vincent's and the funds that she raised allowed the hospital to employ specialist nurses essential to optimal care of diabetic patients.

This year, a personal donation from Margaret Heffernan enabled the restoration of the former chapel at UCD Smurfit Business School to become a state of the art research library. The library houses a collection of 20,000 books, 5,000 theses and an extensive collection of reports and related items. It is the largest and most modern dedicated business library in Ireland.

We are not the first to honour her achievements. In 1988, Margaret received the Dublin City Millennium Award in recognition of her outstanding contribution to the People in Need Trust. This was a



once-off award and formed part of the Dublin millennium celebrations of 1988.

In the following year, 1989, she was one of the first recipients of The Lord Mayor's Award, which honours individuals and groups who have made a special contribution to both Dublin and its citizens. The other award recipients in that year were Frank Feely, Ronnie Delaney and Eamonn Coghlan.

In other countries with formal state honours schemes, Margaret Heffernan would have been knighted or admitted to the Legion d'Honneur. In Ireland, an honorary degree from the National University is intended to convey the same esteem. For her singular contributions to Irish business, for her unstinting support of disadvantaged people in our society, and for her long-standing support of medical research, education and patient care, it is my pleasure and honour to present, to you, Chancellor, for the conferring of an Honorary Degree of Doctor of Laws, Mrs. Margaret Heffernan.

*PRAEHONORABILIS CANCELLARIE, TOTAQUE UNIVERSITAS,*

*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 testur ac spondeo totique Academiae.*