

TEXT OF THE INTRODUCTORY ADDRESS DELIVERED BY: **DR MICHAEL MURPHY**, President, University College Cork on 7 June 2013, on the occasion of the conferring of the Degree of Doctor of Laws, *honoris causa*, on **DERMOT O'MAHONEY**

A Sheánsailéar, a Árd-Mheara, a mhéara luimní, a mhuintir na hOllscoile agus a dhaoine uaisle,

The recipe for university excellence is extensive. The most cited ingredients are academic leadership, diligent teachers and researchers, industrious students, enlightened government and generous public as well as private purses. However, today, we celebrate an ingredient that is generally overlooked and without which UCC would not be today "a good university of high repute" – the accolade awarded by an international expert panel reviewing the university for the Quality Authority of Ireland in January of this year. Without the support, guidance and wisdom, on a voluntary, unpaid and altruistic basis, of many hundreds of external experts and friends, UCC would not succeed. This year, University College Cork honours Dermot O'Mahoney, an exemplar of such service, and takes the opportunity to acknowledge our good fortune in enjoying the commitment of so many citizens of the regional and global communities we serve.

Born Jeremiah Finbarr on 10 September 1940 to Jerry and Una O'Mahoney of Blackrock Road, Cork he was the third of eight children. His father worked in the Royal Naval Dockyard in Haulbowline and the family tradition in matters maritime was continued when two of Dermot's three brothers chose careers in marine engineering. Both parents were committed royalists. Dermot's teenage rebellious streak manifested itself early through turning the Queen's portrait to the wall at family gatherings after Sunday morning Mass.

He was not raised with a silver spoon in his mouth, walking to school at CBS Sullivan's Quay and completing secondary school supported by a scholarship from the Past Pupil's Union – an earlier generation investing in the next.

After schooling, Dermot joined Irish Steel where he studied by night to become a chartered secretary. In the final examination he was placed 1st in the world and was awarded the Kennedy medal. He was recently honoured for his 50 years membership of the Institute of Chartered Secretaries and Administrators (ICSA).

At Irish Steel he met Emer Ward, a Dubliner. I welcome her today, as Mrs. O'Mahoney, along with Ger, Donagh, Oonagh and several of the seven grandchildren. *Mores* of the time required that following marriage one of them would have to move jobs – and in compliance with the rules of our Irish matriarchal society, Dermot joined Verolme Cork Dockyard. There he continued his studies at night to become a certified accountant, coming first in Ireland in several of the examinations. Honouring the adage that cream always rises to the top, Dermot attained the most senior role available to non-Dutch staff at Verolme by becoming Assistant General Manager of Cork Dockyard, one of the largest employers in the region at that time.

When Verolme closed in 1983, and, like his father in the previous generation, Dermot was forced to re-invent himself. Aged 43, he invested his redundancy money to join Ted Dwyer in City Life wealth managers, and retrained himself, to become a Fellow of the Life Assurance Association and a qualified financial adviser or QFA. More challenging was the requirement to adapt from leadership in a large organisation to acquiring a sales mentality in a small one. But, success never eluded him and today, he remains a Director at City Life.

We award honorary doctorates to affirm people who have made outstanding contributions to society and to act as role models for our students, the young generation. While I have set out substantial grounds already – being the best in your chosen field, capacity to re-invent yourself when circumstances dictate, there are in Dermot's case more compelling grounds. Notwithstanding his busy work and family life he has, over 40 years exhibited the most extraordinary generosity in volunteering his time *pro bono publico*.

He has been a member of Scouting Ireland for 65 years, for many years as National Treasurer and he remains chairman of St. Peter and Paul's local unit. In support of the regional economy he has been a board member of the Port of Cork for several decades, and served as Chairman for two terms.

He was Taoiseach of O'Mahony Society, and has been a Council member for 25 years.

He is Board Chairman of the Hope Foundation, the Irish Charity dedicated to the protection of street-children in the slums of Calcutta. Today it has offices in the UK, Germany, the USA as well as Ireland.

But it is for services to the university that we primarily honour him today. He has been a Governor at UCC for 12 years helping ensure that the university responds to the needs of this region and bringing dispassionate objectivity to its strategic direction. He has been the Honorary Treasurer of the University and Chairman of our University Finance Committee for 12 years. During this time, UCC has experienced unprecedented growth in its estate, its academic programmes, and its student numbers. It has established subsidiary companies to provide excellent student services – all achieved while avoiding bankruptcy! Canny stewardship of limited resources has been key to our success and much credit is due to Dermot's wisdom and counsel. He chaired the University Investments Committee when it oversaw the Pension Fund and continues in that office today as it manages the sustenance of funds for scholarships and prizes.

The National University of Ireland has also benefited from his financial prowess. Dermot served on the Senate of NUI for 5 years but will be remembered most for his astute chairing of the NUI Finance Committee where he has stewarded a fundamental overhaul of the university scholarship and prizes investment portfolio.

Mar thoradh ar thairise a mhuintire don údarás ríogúil, ní foláir, is ea thug Diarmuid tacaíocht dhílis dá chuid féin riamh anall do theanga na nGael. Chaith sé na blianta fada mar ionadaí ón gCoiste Rialaithe ar Bhord na Gaeilge i UCC, an Bord san a bhfuil mar fhreagracht air úsáid na hurlabhra úd a chothú is a chur chun cinn ar fud na hOllscoile.

His commitment to UCC has been extraordinary and has always been singularly focussed on the best interest of students. He has been a generous benefactor and his support has been directed to two priorities – disadvantaged students (rehearsing the scholarship support he enjoyed as a schoolboy himself, in the 1950's) and general endowment of the university – a cause that he espouses with passion, but which does not yet enjoy the encouragement from government so evident in other countries.

Many have remarked over the years on his personal attributes – courtesy, coolness under pressure, generosity, steely determination, cleverness – and have wondered about their origins. The truth is, of course, that he practices them in his spare time (or should I say spare, spare time!), on the golf courses of the world.

And even there, he takes on roles of leadership and service – he is a former Captain of Cork Golf Club and Chairman of the Committee of the club, and he serves today as President of Parknasilla GC.

Chancellor, I am delighted to present to you, for the conferment of a Doctorate in Laws, Jeremiah Finbarr (Dermot) O'Mahoney, an outstanding business leader in our city and region, an exemplary donor of time, counsel, energy and money to our voluntary sector, and an invaluable steward of the success of this university.

Praehonorabilis cancellarie, totaque universitas:

Praesento vobis hunc meum filium, quem scio tam moribus quam doctrina habilem et idoneum esse qui admittatur, honoris causa, ad gradum Doctoratus in utroque Jure, tam Civili quam Canonico, idque tibi fide mea testor ac spondeo totique Academiae.