

IN MEMORIAM

JJC President Dr. Gena Proulx

by Kelly Rohder



Though much of the 2010-2011 school year brought about anticipated and oftentimes exciting change, the death of JJC President Gena Proulx was a somber, and for some, an unexpected event.

Diagnosed in 2008 with fallopian tube cancer, Proulx rarely let the disease slow her down, working until just weeks before her death Aug. 12 at age 66. She is survived by her husband, Bill; three adult daughters, Noreen, Nicole and Gisele; her mother, Irene, and her brother Gene.

The college held a memorial Aug. 15, which drew a few hundred campus community members and included remarks from JJC Board of Trustees Chair Barbara DeLaney; Dr. Robert Marcink, faculty union president and English professor; Dr. Christine Sobek, Waubonsee Community College president; and Dr. Michael Vinciguerra, University of St. Francis president. The remembrance, which was held in front of the alumni bell tower outside the Campus Center, concluded with the release of butterflies.

"It's so clear that Gena's vision and leadership over the last five years have made Joliet Junior College a better place," DeLaney said at the memorial. "She was the college's greatest advocate, and for that, we are grateful."

Proulx began her tenure as the seventh president of Joliet Junior College in July 2006. The first woman to hold the position, she came to JJC after serving

six years as president of Dundalk and Essex campuses at The Community College of Baltimore County. She brought over 20 years of teaching experience in the higher education arena and was attracted to JJC, the first public community college in the nation, because of its historical roots.

Proulx devoted the majority of her career to community colleges, holding faculty and administrative posts at Franklin University in Columbus, Ohio, Genesee Community College in Batavia, N.Y. and Clinton Community College in Plattsburgh, N.Y. before coming to JJC.

In 2008, Proulx spearheaded the college's master plan, which came to constitute the largest physical changes to the Main Campus location in its 40-year existence. Through her vision and leadership, seven major construction projects have taken shape across the college landscape to streamline student services and provide the space for programs and training to address critical job shortages. In September, the Board of Trustees voted to name the Campus Center in Proulx's honor.

"She and her team were able to develop a master plan and successfully pass a referendum which has led us to where we are today, with her dream of a space where the students could easily, successfully and efficiently be served in one area of the college," Joan Tierney, senior executive assistant to the president, said.

"She was so proud of our new Campus Center and looked so forward to seeing the students settle in and enjoy the new facility."

During her time at JJC, Proulx was also a strong supporter of the college's chapter of the international honors society, Phi Theta Kappa. Her support of Phi Theta Kappa extended well before her years in Joliet, when she was honored with the Regional Coordinator's Award in 2004 and the Center for Excellence Brick Recognition in 2001 while at the Community College of Baltimore County.

"Gena's enthusiasm for JJC's Phi Theta Kappa chapter has had a tremendous impact on our students," Lisa Sandoval, Phi Theta Kappa adviser and JJC English professor, said. "I am especially thankful for the time she personally spent with our officers, encouraging and inspiring them. Her pride in their accomplishments was motivational and contagious."

Proulx also brought sustainability to the forefront at JJC, helping to make it part of the college's strategic plan and supporting the creation of the first-ever JJC Sustainability Committee. In 2009, she signed the historic American College and University



Presidents' Climate Commitment, an effort by institutions across the country to address global climate disruption, eliminate greenhouse gas emissions from campus operations, and educate students in the process.

That year, she wrote a guest column for the American Council on Education, stating, "Signing the Presidents Climate Commitment is more than a simple act of endorsement. It is recognition of the important role higher education plays in affecting climate change. With more than 11 million students enrolled in two-year institutions throughout the

Proulx was an ardent supporter of cancer research well before her diagnosis, participating in community events like the American Cancer Society's Relay for Life and after her diagnosis, making donations to the Loyola University Cancer Center where she received care. She also donated the wigs she wore during the first year she underwent chemotherapy treatment to Loyola's center.

Two years into treatment, in 2010, Proulx decided to do something she'd never done before to support the cause: she dyed pieces of hair surrounding her face teal, the color that represents

The JJC Foundation Board of Directors has established the Dr. Gena Proulx Memorial Endowed Scholarship to help JJC students reach their educational goals. If you would like to honor Dr. Proulx and help create this living legacy, you can provide a memorial gift to the college by giving online at www.jjc.edu or providing a gift made payable to Joliet

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country, community colleges are in an unprecedented position to reach and influence their students on the issue of climate change."

This dynamic resume matched her active role in the community and in regional and national organizations, where she was a member of the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) Commission on Communication and Marketing, served on the Board of Directors for Provena St. Joseph Medical Center, the Will County Center for Economic Development, the Will County Workforce Investment Board, and maintained membership in the Joliet Rotary Club.

ovarian cancer, in accordance with efforts by the National Ovarian Cancer Coalition. Her drive to support the cause was documented in local newspapers, including the JJC student newspaper, *The Blazer*, in 2008.

"She was a tireless leader and was small in stature but was resolute in her charge to lead the college, even during her last days," Tierney said. "I often referred to her as 'little toughie.' I was fortunate to have seen her the afternoon before she passed and one of her last charges to me was, 'Be strong and carry on.' Dr. Gena Proulx will be remembered by me forevermore."



Junior College Foundation, mailed to the following address: Joliet Junior College, Office of Institutional Advancement, Dr. Gena Proulx Memorial Scholarship, 1215 Houbolt Road, Joliet, IL 60431. For more information, contact Kristin Mulvey at (815) 280-2353.