Legacies: A Vision of Hope

Nobel Prize–winner reflects on science ed

Dr. Richard Smalley '65 appreciates the importance of talented teachers, an excellent program and the facilities needed to support both.

The teaching is an intangible that reflects intense personal dedication. Programs grow from that same dedication, but also require resources. Without resources, the facilities that both need can't happen.

Dr. Smalley won the Nobel Prize in chemistry with two fellow researchers in 1996 for their 1985 discovery of "buckyballs" (buckminsterfullerenes, or carbon 60). He is the Gene and Norman Hackerman Professor of Chemistry and Professor of Physics at Rice University in Houston, Texas, where he also directs the Center for Nanoscale Science and Technology.

He completed his freshman and sophomore years at Hope before transferring to the University of Michigan—two years, he noted, that had a profound impact. For example, he continues to admire the teaching skill of chemist Dr. J. Harvey Kleinheksel '22, "who was then and has for all years since been in my mind the best teacher I've ever experienced."

"He had this wonderful, Socratic style of teaching that I've never seen anybody else match," Dr. Smalley said. "And I can tell you I've tried many years here at Rice to attain even a fraction of that level, and I've never done it. It's a very hard thing to do, and he did it magnificently."

Dr. Smalley took organic chemistry with Dr. Gerri Van Zyl '18 ("He was superb as well"), who was a pioneer in Hope's research–based approach to undergraduate science education. Dr. Smalley was already committed to attending the University of Michigan when his own chance arose to conduct research with Dr. Van Zyl. Based on his experiences in the years since he feels that research–based learning is crucial.

"Oh, I think it's absolutely essential," he said. "It was definitely essential for me to get involved in research, which I did do at Michigan in Ann Arbor and then later on at Shell."

"I learn best when I really get an agenda—there's something I'm really inquisitive about, and then I can go in and learn about it in detail," he said. "So I'm really an experimentalist, and you can't exercise that muscle if you're not in the lab."

"And Hope has done very well on this score through the years," he said.

"The future is very challenging for small colleges — even for big universities. The cost of equipment is dramatically higher than it was when I went to school."

— Dr. Richard Smalley '65

Campus Notes

Largest gift ever spurs new arena

Hope is the intended recipient of a $7.5 million anchor gift from the Richard and Helen DeVos Foundation to serve as a catalyst to enable the college to assume a leadership role in addressing some of the spectator facility needs of the college and Holland community.

President James E. Bultman '63 made the announcement on Monday, March 26, during a press conference on campus.

"We are very grateful to Richard and Helen DeVos, who through their generosity are allowing us to set a vision that will benefit generations of Hope students and Holland area residents for decades to come," he said.

President Bultman noted that representatives of the college are in the preliminary stages of exploring the potential impact of the gift on the design and location of a facility that would be owned and operated by Hope. The project is in addition to those being pursued through the $85 million Legacies: A Vision of Hope campaign.

While still early in the process, college officials are envisioning a spectator facility that would seat approximately 3,500 people for athletic events and would be located on the eastern gateway of the campus.

"This gift builds on earlier community–based initiatives, including the most recent efforts of the Area Center Authority and the Civic Center Task Force," President Bultman said. "It stimulates the process, which has both exciting and realistic potential."

President Bultman said that college officials will involve community leaders in the planning, including those representing the City of Holland, Holland Christian Schools and Holland Public Schools.

President Bultman said that the anchor gift will require other financial support.

"This is a project that Hope College cannot and should not complete independently," he said. "We look forward to engaging supporters in determining the feasibility of such a facility that would impact the college and community in mutually beneficial ways."

The gift from the Richard and Helen DeVos Foundation is the largest ever given to Hope for a capital project.

Hope has played its men’s basketball games at the Holland Civic Center since the 1954–55 season. The men’s basketball team has not played its home games in an on-campus facility since the 1929–30 season, when it moved from the Carnegie–Schouten gymnasium to the Holland (National Guard) Armory, where games were played until the current Holland Civic Center was built.

The Dow Health and Physical Education Center, opened on the Hope campus in 1978, was designed as an activity–oriented facility and has served to a limited degree as a spectator facility for some intercollegiate sports, such as women’s basketball, swimming and volleyball. ©