When a place is called Hope, getting mired in pessimism just wouldn’t be right.

And so, while the college faces the challenges resulting from the most significant global economic crisis since the Great Depression, Hope is also looking ahead with a longer view, its focus on how best to continue to do what it has always done. It is, in fact, what the college’s mission statement, grounded in nearly 150 years of history, calls Hope to do: “educate students for lives of leadership and service in a global society through academic and co-curricular programs of recognized excellence in the liberal arts and in the context of the historic Christian faith.”

Admittedly, that calling seemed easier a year ago—before the economy began its downward spiral last September, before norovirus and H1N1 outbreaks in November and April respectively, before a vicious mid-June storm wreaked flood havoc campus-wide. Fortunately, as President James Bultman ’63 likes to quip, Hope has so far managed to avoid a plague of locusts. So far.

“It has been one of the more challenging years during my time in higher education,” said Dr. Bultman, Hope’s president since 1999 and a college professor, dean and president since 1968. “There were so many external factors that impinged on the operation of the college.”

The health and weather incidents were blips—although, like institutions nationwide, Hope has plans in place if there’s an H1N1 recurrence—but the economy is another matter. Granted, there have been signs that the decline has slowed, maybe stopped, maybe is reversing, but no experts are predicting a quick turn-around.

Hope proceeds with the belief that the education the college provides, a rich mix of intellectual, physical, social and spiritual development, will not only continue but is in fact essential to preparing servant-leader citizens who will play a critical role in shaping for the better a broken world in need.
The situation is particularly acute in Michigan, where unemployment has been among the nation's highest at 15 percent and a $2.8 billion revenue shortfall has the state anticipating major budget cuts—including, potentially, much of the state scholarship aid on which most of the college's Michigan students depend. At the same time, the value of the college's endowment is down by 20 percent, ancillary income from campus operations such as the conference services program has dropped, and donor support has declined as well (the college landed within $150,000 of its $3.1 million goal for the Hope Fund this past year, but the number of donors dropped by nearly eight percent versus 2007-08).

However, it all could be much worse—and it has been worse at other institutions that found themselves less prepared. Yes, Hope had it has been worse at other institutions that have been worse at other institutions. However, it all could be much worse—and even in the face of their own challenging circumstances, appreciative alumni and friends have been making good choices, recognizing the difference that Hope makes in their lives—and that they in turn can help Hope make in others’ lives.

“I had a great experience at Hope and have supported the Hope Fund almost every year since I graduated—through law school and now as I’m repaying student loans,” said Amy Fox ’95. “I think to significantly reduce what I contributed to the Hope Fund, and thought about not giving at all. My husband was unemployed for a couple of months and the non-profit organization I work for was facing a financial crisis so I was compelled to divert more of my charitable giving there. But I know that alumni support is so important to the college and want to help other students have a great experience like I did, so even though I gave less, I still did what I could.”

“For the past, literally as well as figuratively. The recent Firm Foundation.

Moving Forward, Hope adds facilities not for their own sake, but to enable faculty, staff and students to perform at the very highest levels throughout the college’s holistic emphasis on intellectual, physical, social and spiritual development. The new Van Andel Soccer Stadium also continues the college’s past in recognizing the “eastern gateway” to the city of Holland.

“Two things that I have always admired about Hope is that Hope proceeds with the belief that the education the college provides, a rich mix of intellectual, physical, social and spiritual development, will not only continue but is in fact essential to preparing servant-leader citizens who will play a critical role in shaping for the better a broken world in need.”

“For the future – that things will get better, that we will progress, and that there will be a greater Hope.”

—President James Bultman ’63

People of Hope. In a year when many institutions have experienced significant enrollment declines, Hope’s enrollment is the second-highest ever at 3,230 students. Recognizing that students and families appreciate and deserve what Hope has to offer, the college’s priorities include limiting expenses and building the endowment to help provide additional scholarship aid and reduce Hope’s reliance on tuition to pay annual operating expenses.

Firm Foundation, Hope builds on a strong past, literally as well as figuratively. The recent Firm Foundation.

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