The Campaign For Rollins
Finale Remarks

October 19, 2001

Following the September 11th attacks on America, we considered canceling our campaign celebration. But we thought we should try to return to normalcy, despite the fact that the American landscape is fundamentally altered. We have learned that normalcy will not return. Rather, we must learn to operate within a "new normal" environment as did residents of Oklahoma City after the bombing of the federal building there. And so, within the "new normal" we have decided to allow ourselves to celebrate, without guilt, the accomplishments of this special college in generating funds to assure a bright future.

Five years ago, our Board of Trustees voted to announce a $100-million fund-raising campaign. I do not believe that anyone at that meeting or in the Rollins community would have predicted the incredible success of The Campaign For Rollins! Today's formal academic convocation represents a communal expression of pride in this achievement.

Our campaign is part of this country's great philanthropic tradition, which has played a major role in the shaping of American higher education. Since 1638, when John Harvard left half of his estate to that Massachusetts institution, gifts have been vital to the founding and the flowering of colleges and universities.

So it was with Rollins at its founding in 1885; so it has been throughout its history. Next month, we celebrate the 116th year of the College and the extraordinary story of its creation. How in the world did the undeveloped frontier town of Winter Park win the Congregational Association's statewide competition for the new college? The townspeople did it by raising more money than any other Florida community. That was the College's first fund-raising campaign, and Alonzo Rollins was our John Harvard. As a result of the vigorous fund-raising efforts in Winter Park, the shared dream of Miss Lucy Cross and the Reverend Edward Hooker was translated into the reality of Florida's first college.

For all of the 116 years of our history, philanthropy has played a significant role in building facilities, developing academic programs, recruiting students and faculty, and, yes, balancing the budget. One thing is sure: without those who asked for and those who provided financial support throughout the years, we could not have built the financially healthy, top-ranked institution that Rollins is today. We stand, humbly, on the shoulders of all those who came before us.

In the early 20th century, Hamilton Holt, that golden personality, rescued Rollins from financial ruin through his extraordinary vision and unremitting fund raising. In the 1980s, President Thad Seymour mounted a major fund-raising drive, which concluded well in excess of its goal. Our beautiful Olin Library, the signature gift of that campaign, symbolized the College's renewed commitment to academic quality.

When we laid plans in the early 1990s for the campaign we celebrate today, the country was in an economic slump, there was a decline in the number of students attending college, and Rollins, like many institutions, went through a painful period of downsizing and budget cutting. We were fortunate that by the time The Campaign For Rollins was in full bloom, the economy and stock market were rebounding and increasing numbers of students applying to college.
We are immensely grateful to all those who have helped us prepare the College for the next 116 years. Thanks to this campaign, we will have six new state-of-the-art buildings, many high-tech classrooms, and a long-awaited entranceway. These additions, together with new sculptures, fountains, and gardens, have transformed this beautiful campus into a triumph of aesthetic pleasure.

The Campaign has recognized the work of this extraordinary faculty, unparalleled in their devotion to students, by establishing new academic and service-oriented programs and centers, and 13 new endowed faculty chairs.

Most significantly, the Campaign has made a Rollins education affordable for untold numbers of students, today and in the future. It is no coincidence that our applications for undergraduate admission have increased over 30 percent in the last two years, and that our student body this year is larger, smarter, and more diverse than ever before.

This campaign has significantly improved Rollins’ quality and reputation as well as its financial health. We requested and accepted only those gifts that would support our historic values of excellence, innovation, and community. You may be surprised to learn that we declined a few gifts because they were not in keeping with our mission. Above all, we have sought to be true to our mission and values, and to maintain what George Cornell refers to as Rollins’ friendly and homelike atmosphere.

Tonight, at the Gala, we will be thanking our donors, but I want now to mention some special people. This campaign simply would not have been successful without the leadership and involvement of the Rollins College Board of Trustees. I cannot believe that there exists anywhere in America a more supportive, dedicated, or generous board than ours. I am especially grateful to those who served as board chairs during this period, and to Charlie Rice and Barbara Alfond, who have worked so tirelessly as chairs of the Campaign.

I also applaud our alumni. When I came to Rollins in 1990, I was told repeatedly that our alumni love the College but do not support it financially. Well, our alumni have made all the difference, and there is no aspect of this campaign that makes me prouder than the fact that Rollins alumni have contributed over half of the campaign total.

I must acknowledge the work of two administrators without whom we could not have achieved such success. Vice President Emeritus Warren Johnson ably led the initial effort, reaching the $80 million mark. His creative ideas led to some of our earliest large gifts. I remember the day Warren and I waltzed around my office upon learning about a $2 million gift. In a seamless transition, our incomparable advancement vice president, Annie Kerr, picked up the mantle and led us to this great victory. About Anne, people tell me: "You just can't say no to her." Anne and I have celebrated many wonderful gifts with shrieks, songs, hugs, and lots of iced tea. I salute her brilliant leadership, academic values, discipline, and beautiful spirit.

Our supporters have recognized that Rollins is a precious, and increasingly rare, type of American college, defined by an unwavering commitment to the art of teaching and the preparation of students for active citizenship in a global society. In this fragile world, a liberal arts education remains our best hope for
sustaining democratic values and celebrating diversity. And a broad-based, global management education assures that business leaders will value sustainability as well as profitability.

If Rollins is truly "On the Move," we have the faculty and staff to thank. These are the people at the heart of the enterprise; these are the people who deliver on our promise of a personal and challenging education. Many have contributed to the Campaign; all have been cheerleaders for it.

I thank everyone for participating in the campaign and in this celebration. It has been a great joy for me to work with all of you in building one of America's best colleges. We still have miles to go in our quest: buildings in need of renovation, programs with insufficient funding, students requiring financial assistance. But for this moment, we should revel in our success. Rollins has never been stronger, or better, or happier. Thanks to all of you.