

Hello, Everyone,

I am Cordelia (also known as Dee) Manning. I came to Wooster as Director of Admission in 1993. After a little time here, I came to feel, and found many others who agreed, that there was something important we could do to make Wooster an even better place. We saw great strength in the areas of both academics and sports but agreed that the best schools are also strong in the arts, and this was an area in which Wooster was lacking. I stated our case to then Headmaster, John Cheeseman, who replied, "Well then, get out there and do something about it!" He gave us a budget of \$300, and the Cultural Committee (later to become the Arts and Letters Committee) was formed.

The Committee consisted of the Heads of Lower, Middle, and Upper School, teachers of art and music, and parents. Some of those original members of the Cultural Committee and some that joined soon thereafter are here tonight and I would like to introduce them to you:

Beth Hamilton, then Head of Lower School

Barbara Maisonpierre, then Lower School Music
teacher

Debbie Chodoff, Art Department Head

And parents of Wooster students--

Lisa Huber,

Margot Mustich

Anne Gilson

Andrea Barrett

John Cheeseman, then Head of School, was with us earlier for a reunion in the Reception Center but had to leave for another appointment

There were others, unable to be here tonight and I would like to mention them as well: our beloved Alvin Hamilton, Director of Studies, who rearranged so many schedules in order that we could bring in our arts programs and assemblies, Jean Hocine, Head of Middle School, Neal Adams, Head of Upper School, Marilyn MacAleavy, Upper School music teacher, Nancy Maxwell, history teacher and College Guidance Counselor, and parents Lynne Slonaker, Pat Snyder, Louise Bachler, and Kyle Risely. Love and thanks to you all.

So. What did the Cultural Committee do? The first thing we did was to start bringing “cultural” groups in for Assemblies. A few of them were: Tibetan monks, singing groups from Yale, and Isabella Duncan dancers who danced on the lawn. A group of young Russian dancers came to us through a group called Cultural Connections, who asked us to house the dancers with Wooster families in exchange for a rousing performance, which they gave in the gym. This began our association with Cultural Connections, which promotes international understanding through student exchanges in the arts, and with whom Wooster still works today.

Then we started working to build existing programs and create new ones.

We saw to it that student art work was hung throughout the school. The art center became the Art Department, with Ms. Chodoff as Head. Wooster started to be recognized and sought out as a school with a first rate Art Department.

Music, too, became a Department, with Ms. MacAleavy as Head, working closely with Ms. Maisonpierre and her fine Lower School program.

At the time I came to Wooster, plays were only put on occasionally, a director being brought in for a single show every now and then. We pushed for a full-time theatre teacher to be brought on staff to teach classes and direct plays on a regular basis. Soon thereafter, the Black Box theatre was built. Now we have Ms. Simard and her wonderful Theatre Department.

We started dance classes, offered in the after-school program. We started a Jazz Festival in the Reception Center, held on Saturday nights with parents, students, and members of the greater community attending. We arranged for the first video classes to be held and we brought in visiting artists from many disciplines to present their work and give workshops. ~~A group of fourth and ninth graders travelled together to the Metropolitan Museum in New York City to study ancient Greek statues, the ninth graders acting as docents for the fourth graders.~~

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, we looked carefully at our chapel and thought we might make it even more beautiful and inspiring. Iron screens and a small archway within the great arch were removed and a contest was held to find an artist who would create the best plan to beautify the chapel. The winner was Sara Waterbury (plaque), who painted what you see before you, swirling upwards to the heavens, in her studio in Riverside, California. She shipped it in pieces here to Wooster, and travelled here to install it, which she did herself with the help of the buildings and grounds crew. Many of us here today were present for the installation and inauguration. I'm told that visitors to the school today are amazed by Wooster's Chapel and that current faculty, students, and parents love it as much as we all did and do.

All this was a joyous team effort. We were a great group, who loved one another and loved what we were doing. We were allowed to “think big” but every one of us was also willing to do the nitty-gritty behind the scenes work to make our dreams a reality. And the foundation of that dream was our desire to support, nurture and reward all of you students in your pursuit of the arts and literature — those out front and those behind the scenes. It was in this spirit that the Cordelia Manning Service to the Arts Award was created — an honor given in my name but actually in recognition of all those who worked to make this dream a reality. May you pursue your artists’ dreams, and may Wooster’s commitment to the arts thrive and continue always.