

## **Principal, Jim Laussen's address at the 2012 Presentation Night.**

I have been asked a number of times this year what story I am going to tell this evening, indeed there was some speculation about it by one of the speakers in our Senior School House public speaking competition, the speaker wondering how I was planning to spin a message around this year's theme of *an attitude of gratitude*.

Recently, I shared with staff that my father was a great story teller when we were children. As a lay preacher, his addresses to children of a Sunday were always a source of great joy. Having grown up in a house with a story teller it was probably just a natural thing that I have always used stories to try and help explain a difficult concept or idea to my classes...now using stories in assemblies, presentation nights or even at staff meetings, is just an extension of this.

However, I do not need to tell a story this year because the story is in this room.

Please look around this room and see the others that belong to this community.....it is an awesome sight.

In 1987, the College opened with 311 students and 20 staff

Twenty five years' later, we have 2265 students, 305 staff and 1462 families

In this room tonight, for the first time since the Taylors Lakes Campus opened in 1996, we are all together, in the one place, as a single community. It is fantastic to be here with our children from Prep to Year 12 together for the first time at a Presentation Night and I must thank our Junior School families for bringing your children tonight and for being a part of this special one-off event.

In 25 years our College has grown to be a large and vibrant community. There are no plans of any sort to have it grow any further than we see it here this evening. As you continue to look around this room know that each of us here tonight is connected to each other through our belonging to Overnewton Anglican Community College.

Whether in Prep or Year 12, in one of our Middle Schools or Canowindra, whether from Taylors Lakes or Keilor, whether a student, a staff member, a parent, grandparent, aunty, uncle, old collegian, supplier, banker or friend each person in this room tonight shares a special connection with every other person as valued member of our community.

The most crucial element to me of an Overnewton education has been that every child enters their time at the College knowing that their parents and guardians are walking with them, supporting them and being part of their education in a way that happens in no other school. Given the size of our College it is a remarkable thing that our parent contribution is as strong as it has ever been in our history.

In this room is our story; I could tell it no better.

As Manny mentioned in his speech, over the last year, there has been a lot of negative press about the leadership of a few independent schools. School boards have been called into account because of their lack of sound financial planning, in the most drastic cases causing two excellent schools to be closed down and one school losing its principal in a case that saw the board of that school being described as too corporate and not remembering that they were governing a school.

I know that the college has had to increase its fees over recent years and that this has been difficult for our families. But we have done this to ensure that we have the income necessary to provide the levels of service and facilities families have come to expect and because the funding we have received from state and federal governments continues proportionally to reduce each year - therefore the only way of increasing our income is through fees.

It is because of the financial wizardry of Don Hilton and his finance committee that the College is in an extremely strong position; we are absolutely financially viable. As a community we have to be grateful to the work of Don and his team who have set us in such a strong place.

Recently, Bev and I were chatting with some of our friends who were completely unconnected with Overnewton and we started talking about Board Chairs.

I spoke of the extraordinary leadership Manny has shown over the past ten years. Manny chairs a board that is absolutely corporate in its approach - after all, it is responsible for the governance of a 37million dollar company and so needs to be.

Like other members of the Board, he loves and is passionate about this college too; you have seen this already this evening. Any of you who have had even the most remote interaction with him will have known this to be the case already. When our friends asked what was so special about Manny, my wife said he has the kindest eyes and that this carries to the way he treats people. As chair he has led a diverse group of board members to be an extraordinary team who act corporately but who never forget to do what they believe is best for the future of a college that they each know and love personally.

Our board has been dogged in its determination to ensure the longevity of the college so that every child in this room tonight and

their children and grandchildren in the future will have a school to attend and belong to and be proud of. I believe that we are truly blessed to have this group leading us and to have had Manny leading them.

Ordinarily, at Presentation Night, I have thanked each group that makes up our community individually. However, tonight, I am not going to do that. To each of you, student, staff, family member, old collegian, banker, supplier, and so on, I thank you for your contribution to making this college the great place of learning that it is today.

My story, our story, tonight is about each of the people in this room and the part each of you has played in our journey to this point. I trust that each of you know the privilege it is to be part of the story of Overnewton in its 25<sup>th</sup> year; it is exciting to think about how that story will have unfolded further after the next 25 years.

Whilst, I know that I will not be standing in this position in 25 years' time, I hope that I might be sitting here somewhere continuing to be grateful for the honour it has been to be a part of this school.

Thank you.