

PORTRAITS OF LIFE EXHIBIT CLOSING

Embracing Diversity

A Speech by
Montgomery College President
Dr. DeRionne Pollard

Thank you Dr. Preston. It is a wonderful evening as we gather to celebrate the power of being true to oneself...of embracing, empowering, and expressing who we really are and using that conviction as a source of personal and community strength and betterment.

Now that sounds familiar. Quite familiar actually. In fact, isn't that our mission? We, at Montgomery College, empower students to change their lives and we enrich the life of our community.

It is no coincidence that the purpose of this exhibit *Portraits of Life: LGBT Stories of Being—Embrace, Empower, Express* mirrors the mission of our College. I would argue our College has a duty, an obligation, to spearhead initiatives like this. We, as the community's college, must be at the forefront of

embracing all members of our community. But, more than that, we must be about educating all members of our community.

As the largest undergraduate institution in the state of Maryland, we are in fact an anchor institution. What do I mean by that term? Anchor institution. Let's start, as I usually do, by looking at that word, anchor. Yes, we know it's that big metal object used to secure a ship. But more than that, it is that which "can be relied on for support, stability, or security," a "mainstay." A number of community and business leaders have attached that term to institutions, to describe organizations "highly motivated to invest in place"¹ and those that "wield the greatest influence – as employers, as developers, as purchasers

¹ http://www.ceosforcities.org/pagefiles/behave_anchors.pdf

of goods and services and as sources of creativity and innovation.”

Combining these definitions, I think it’s quite clear that Montgomery College is, in fact, an anchor institution. We are a mainstay. We are firmly anchored in Montgomery County and are highly motivated to invest in our county’s greatest assets: our people, our community. After all, our success is directly tied to their success. We are a place of support, stability, and security. We are a source of creativity and innovation. We are an institution that wields a tremendous amount of influence on our external community. We are an anchor institution.

This position of power and influence means the responsibility to be a thought center, a thought generator. As an anchor institution, we cannot, and will not, shy from the difficult

conversations. Quite the contrary. Our new strategic plan, *Montgomery College 2020*, emphasizes our role as a place that “facilitates intercultural understand and/or neutral public dialogues on issues of importance and to bring the community to the College.”

And so, what better way of actualizing our mission than to celebrate members of our community, who also happen to be part of the LGBT community. We have shined the spotlight on individuals who are proud of who they are, and who they love, and see their difference as a source of strength, not of fear. As a member of these communities, I am proud of this exhibit.

This brings me full circle, to where we began when the exhibit opened earlier this summer. In my opening remarks, I mentioned the South African philosophy called ubuntu. “I am

what I am because of who we are.” South African Archbishop Desmond Tutu has said, “all belong: gay, lesbian, so-called straight. All, all are meant to be held in this incredible embrace that will not let us go.” I am proud that our College walks the walk, and talks the talk. We embrace all. We celebrate the diversity of our community. What a perfect way to truly influence and strengthen our community as an anchor institution.

Speaking of an anchor. You could call the person whom I am about to introduce my anchor. Would Jeffrey Slavin please join me.

Jeffrey Slavin is a true community leader and a dear friend, to me personally, to the College, and to the entire LGBT

community. He is a personal source of strength, courage, conviction, and leadership.

In addition to being mayor of the town of Somerset since 2008, Jeffrey is the vice president and treasurer of the Sanford and Doris Slavin Foundation. Personally and through his work with the foundation, Jeffrey is a true gift to our community. His generosity to both the College and our entire region is inspiring. You could say generosity is in his blood. His parents, Sanford and Doris Slavin, have a long history of giving back and strengthening the community. Through their foundation, they fund a variety of initiatives, including those aimed at human rights, civil liberties, health and human services, and the arts. They are why we are here today. Thanks to the generosity of

Jeffrey Slavin, his parents Sanford and Doris, and his sister, Roni, this Portraits of Life exhibit exists!

To express our gratitude for their generosity, Montgomery College is honored to present Jeffrey Slavin with a timepiece designed by Byron Whitehurst, class of 1970, who donated his time and talent to create these clocks for friends of the College. The clock is made from original marble recovered from the steps of the US Capitol during its renovation. The clock represents the commemorative arch found in the Great Hall of the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C., founded by Thomas Jefferson. It is fitting since Jefferson spent part of his career advocating that an essential component of democracy and political liberty was education, including the responsibility to provide *all* children with access to an education.

In addition to the clock, we would like for you, Jeffrey, to have this framed photograph of Molly and you from this beautiful exhibit. It is our way of showing you how much we appreciate your generosity and support of Montgomery College and Montgomery County. Thank you!