We’re off!

College launches Campaign St. Norbert: Full Ahead
College launches Campaign St. Norbert: Full Ahead

St. Norbert College began an exciting new chapter in its history on Sept. 15 with a launch celebration for Campaign St. Norbert: Full Ahead. The campaign is a multi-year initiative to build on the college’s recent momentum and secure its place among the top echelon of Catholic liberal arts colleges.

Campaign St. Norbert: Full Ahead will raise $90 million for several important goals, including increased financial aid, greater support for faculty programs, an enhanced student experience, maintenance of existing facilities and, perhaps most exciting, the construction of a new, state-of-the-art center for the sciences.

The theme of the campaign, “Full Ahead,” was chosen to reflect the confidence among college leadership that this is a time to act boldly. With a carefully developed strategic plan, the strong support of a committed community, and the exceptional momentum the institution has gathered in recent years, all are agreed: This is St. Norbert’s time.

Tom Kunkel
President of St. Norbert College

We’re off!

Over the course of more than 100 years, St. Norbert College has shown the power of community. Alumni, students, family and friends, faculty, staff, Norbertines: As a community, we’ve built a college … made it strong … established an extraordinary legacy. Traveling together, we’ve come far.

Now, we’re embarking on a new journey – a campaign to firmly establish St. Norbert among the elite Catholic liberal arts colleges. Through Campaign St. Norbert: Full Ahead, we will seize the momentum built in our first century to move this great institution forward.

I invite you to join us as we chart a course toward a remarkable future for St. Norbert College. We will succeed as we have in the past – as a community. Working together, we have no limits.

Tom Kunkel
President of St. Norbert College

Attendees at the Sept. 15 launch celebration were treated to performances by the student Jazz Ensemble, the Knights on Broadway, the SNC faculty’s Bay Winds Trio, and SNC alumna Jenny Thiel ’01.

With the wind at our backs and momentum on our side, we eagerly embark on Campaign St. Norbert: Full Ahead.

We’re off!
Fully 97% of those currently enrolled at the college receive some form of financial aid. Through Campaign St. Norbert: Full Ahead, we will provide aid to the neediest of students, for whom a college education would be otherwise unattainable. We will also assist students from working-class families, for whom tuition payments are pitted squarely, often overwhelmingly, against the costs of supporting a household. And we will fund merit-based scholarships that will attract students of high caliber to St. Norbert, further enhancing the rich dialogue that takes place on our campus every day.

A nourishing gift

The college has recently received a substantial gift from an unexpected source.

As a cook in the college cafeteria for decades, Regina Willems helped nourish generations of hungry students. With her passing in April at the age of 102, she left St. Norbert College an unrestricted gift of $375,000.

Miss Willems worked in the college cafeteria in the 1940s and 1950s, succeeding her mother, who held the job in the ’30s. After her time at the college, she worked in the kitchen of De Pere’s Union Hotel; later, she served the Norbertine Abbey in De Pere, also as a cook.

Dee Geurts-Bengston of the Office of College Advancement, whose mother was one of Miss Willems’s closest friends while the two lived at the Union Hotel, describes her as “one of the hardest-working women I ever knew” – deeply religious, devoutly Catholic, and strongly loyal to the Norbertine fathers.

The Rev. Rowland De Peaux, O.Praem., ’48, recalls working in the cafeteria with Miss Willems when he was a freshman. He said: “So many of the employees of the college then truly felt they were part of the Norbertine family. They made a minimal salary, but they were deeply dedicated to the Norbertines and to the college.”

Fr. De Peaux noted that in later years, Miss Willems would often reminisce about her time at the college and express her fondness for the people she had come to know here.

Now her love for the college community will be felt by new generations of students, faculty and staff in some very tangible ways.

Unrestricted gifts like Miss Willems’s allow the college to apply funds to the areas of greatest need, and already that flexibility has proven valuable. From her bequest, $100,000 has been earmarked for emergency aid to current students who find themselves in difficult and urgent financial straits.

In addition, $175,000 has been earmarked for the Riordan Family Endowment, established by former college trustee Mike Riordan. The Riordan Endowment is dedicated to providing faculty with the resources they need to conduct research, and particularly to develop the student-faculty collaborative research projects our students so often find transformational.

The remaining $100,000 in Miss Willems’s bequest will be applied to the remaking of St. Boniface Church into Dudley Birder Hall, the newest performance and rehearsal space on campus.

From this single gift we are thus able to advance three of the goals of Campaign St. Norbert: Full Ahead. The Willems bequest increases financial aid, promotes faculty excellence, and enriches the student experience.
Students learn most deeply when they are fully engaged inside and outside the classroom. For some, a trip to a foreign country opens their eyes to the richness of the world’s cultures and the depths of its needs. Others find within our local community the opportunity to apply their growing knowledge for the good of all. Still others discover on the campus itself new ways to express themselves, new interests to explore, new strengths and aptitudes. Through signature organizations like the Norman Miller Center for Peace, Justice & Public Understanding and the Sturzl Center for Community Service and Learning, through robust initiatives like study abroad and the Honors Program, and through myriad other opportunities for student involvement and engagement, we enable this personal growth. The Campaign will sustain those efforts, helping our students come to know their world, and themselves.

We’re pleased to announce that one of the cornerstones of the student experience at St. Norbert has just been blessed with a gift of remarkable generosity. The Peace and Justice Center, henceforth known as the Norman Miller Center for Peace, Justice & Public Understanding, was recently endowed by Mrs. Shirlyn Miller, in honor of her late husband. Many in the St. Norbert community are familiar with the Norman and Louis Miller Lectures in Public Understanding, which for two decades have brought important speakers like Leonard Pitts, Sean Callaghan and Rick Nahmias to campus, most recently under the auspices of the Peace and Justice Center. Mrs. Miller’s passion not just for the lecture series but for the mission of the Peace and Justice Center itself led to her endowment of the center. Today, and long into the future, the Norman Miller Center for Peace, Justice & Public Understanding will help us advance the Norbertine ideals we hold most dear, not just among our students but, through them, across the globe.

St. Norbert College embraces both faith and reason. Faith, eternal and unchanging, provides our roots. Reason, striving toward the light of new knowledge and understanding, provides our branches. In few places can we better affirm our passion for inquiry and our quest for knowledge than in our science facilities. The completion of the John R. Minahan Science Hall almost 50 years ago was just such an affirmation. But science has changed profoundly since then, and our facilities must keep pace. Through Campaign St. Norbert: Full Ahead, they will keep pace ... and more. Our new science center will enable faculty and students to work on the leading edge of science and mathematics.

Faculty who are passionate about teaching are drawn to St. Norbert because, in the intimate classrooms here, they can instruct small groups of students ... open their eyes to the wonders of the world ... and change lives. Consistently, our students point to the one-on-one attention they receive as the best part of their college experience; just as consistently, our alumni point to faculty who had a transformational effect on their lives. Through Campaign St. Norbert: Full Ahead, we will support research projects that not only advance our faculty’s own scholarship, but provide rich source material for classroom instruction. We will also support student-faculty collaborations, providing distinctive experiences to propel our students to future success.