

ALUMNI FOR LIFE



Madison College sign represents Madison Experience for alumni

BY SABRINA MORENO ('19), *alumni relations intern*

In 1975, Barbara DeBellis Kennedy ('79) viewed the pale concrete Madison College sign as an indicator that she was home. In her sophomore year, talks about the college's name changing—to James Madison University—would be a common conversation, and to Kennedy and her friends, it made sense.

With programs advancing and more degrees being offered, Madison College was becoming more than the renowned teachers college Kennedy chose. She'd wanted to be an educator since grade school.

While the process was already underway—and President Ronald E. Carrier was set to speak in front of the Virginia General Assembly to advocate for the name change—Kennedy remembers passing by what was then the student center and seeing ballots handed out to ask students what the institution should be called.

Cathy Foley Chisholm ('77) was the senior class co-president who hand-counted the ballots. The vote came back 84 percent for James Madison University.

"Dr. Carrier always had the students' best interest at heart, and I know that he wanted us to be a part of this process," Chisholm said. "It was just like Dr. Carrier to want to make this an inclusive decision."

Throughout Chisholm's time at Madison, enrollment almost doubled, and her husband, Bruce Chisholm ('77), saw the football team go from playing its first game to having the longest winning streak in program history at the time. He was there when they replaced Madison College with a metal wraparound that said James Madison University. In the years that followed, he felt knowing what was underneath was like being in on a secret.

"Back then, there was nothing on the other side of I-81," Bruce Chisholm said. "We thought Gibbons Hall was the greatest thing we had going ... Now, we drive through the east side

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— CATHY CHISHOLM ('77)

(Above): The Madison College sign is removed from the Port Republic Road entrance and installed outside of the Leeolou Alumni Center.

of campus and it's like, 'Wow, look at all of this.'"

Earlier this year, when JMU revamped its sign on Port Republic Road, the famed Madison College sign that marked the entrance to the university was moved outside of the Leeolou Alumni Center. For Kennedy, it represents not only how the connections and relationships formed in a nurturing environment like JMU prepare students for the world and their careers, but also how Carrier built the foundation for what the college would become.

"We felt like he was on our side. I don't think we ever felt like we were in opposition," Kennedy said. "We were all pro-JMU and the more we could build, the more we could advance, the more sports teams we could add and all those things, that was all for the better."

Even in 1977, Cathy Chisholm said, students knew something great was going on, and with Carrier's extraordinary vision, she felt she was graduating from a university ready to make a name for itself.

With the Madison College sign being preserved, the Chisholms enjoy the respect JMU is showing toward its past and the people who belonged to the Madison College era. "We need to stay true to our foundation, to tradition," Cathy Chisholm said. "And to me, honoring that JMU/Madison College tradition is what that sign is all about."

Carrie Combs ('07, '09M), executive director of the JMU Alumni Association, said, "I feel both honored and privileged that the Leeolou Alumni Center gets to be the keeper of such an important piece of our university's history. I hope alumni will see the Madison College sign and be proud of the legacy they have created and the university we have become."