Leader of the Year
Quarterbacks College Forward

Dr. Hercules Pinkney
Symbolizes “Endless Possibilities”

By Charles Maier (’93), Maier & Warner PR

He’s not exactly a famous, veteran quarterback coaxed out of retirement to lead a team to success, but he is celebrated. Dr. Hercules Pinkney, like NFL all-pro quarterback Bret Favre who famously un-retired to lead his team to the playoffs, was recruited to be the face of the “franchise” – Montgomery College – to stabilize the school and lead it forward.

Hercules Pinkney (’02) had recently retired as a provost of Montgomery College and was busy planning the next chapter of his life. That’s when the call came to return to campus as interim president, to lead the academic institution until a permanent successor could be found.

His success, in just seven short months, has earned Hercules Pinkney the distinction of the Sandy Spring Bank Outstanding Leader Award, to be presented on June 10 by Leadership Montgomery.

“After all the going away parties, after all the speeches, after he said his final goodbyes, he and his wife were ready to enjoy a well-deserved break,” said one observer. “That didn’t happen as Montgomery College was in the midst of a very public crisis.”

Last September, three months after Dr. Pinkney retired, the college’s board of trustees elected to make a change in the college’s presidency. Facing a battery of TV cameras and media, the board announced the change. At the same time, the board announced its decision to re-hire Hercules Pinkney and install him as interim president.

Within 24 hours, Dr. Pinkney was back in Rockville.

He’s “the consummate collaborator,” said Renee Winsky, CEO of the Tech Council of Maryland. “He always sought the facts and opinions of all sides of an issue, while diplomatically garnering support for those things that brought him to the table.” That was just the remedy the college needed at that juncture, Winsky added.

When a person is thrust into the middle of a crisis, it can be the ultimate test of character. How he (or she) reacts, often defines leadership.

“Herc is an outstanding leader and deserves to be recognized for the great work he has done – above and beyond the call of duty,” said Marilyn Balcombe (’00), executive director of the Gaithersburg-Germantown Chamber of Commerce (GGCC). “Although Dr. Pinkney has been a strong leader throughout his career, the true test of his leadership came after he retired.”

When he presided as provost of Montgomery College’s Germantown campus, Dr. Pinkney was always visible in the community. He actively supported arts organizations, and chambers of commerce, and he worked to establish a novel biotechnology initiative on the college’s Germantown campus.

“We could not have had a better neighbor in Germantown than Montgomery College and Dr. Pinkney,” said Hughes Network Systems’ Jim Muir (’01), a businessman who has worked alongside Hercules Pinkney. “Dr. Pinkney is a gentleman, humble and represents the college and our community in an outstanding manner,” Muir said.

GGCC president Marilyn Balcombe has also closely observed Dr. Pinkney’s college-community work, particularly his efforts to create a partnership for entrepreneurship that would enhance the relationship between business and education by having entrepreneurs growing their companies on campus.

“Herc understands the value of a vibrant economy and the importance of bringing high-level jobs to the area,” Balcombe says. “He has worked very hard to help provide a seamless transition from high school, to community college, to the Universities at Shady Grove, and to employment in a high level job without ever leaving Montgomery County.”

A lifelong educator, Dr. Pinkney joined Montgomery College in 1979, serving as the assistant dean for programming in continuing education at Montgomery College. He left in 1983 for academic posts elsewhere, but returned to Montgomery College in 2000 as vice president and provost of the Germantown campus.

Dr. Pinkney believes in the mission of community colleges, of providing access to higher education, observers say. “Hercules Pinkney has reached out to the disenfranchised and disappointed,” said Judith Vaughn-Prather (’02) executive director of the county’s Commission for Women. “He re-set the goals of the college and established a vision of one, cohesive, united, well-functioning and extraordinary college.”

Montgomery County Public Schools parent resource teacher Teresa Rios Wright (’00) says that Dr. Pinkney exemplifies the college’s motto of ‘endless possibilities.” He encourages the college to go the extra mile to serve students and their families, and he encourages Latino students to complete their college programs and go on to pursue four-year degrees.

“Jovial” “upbeat,” “encouraging” and “passionate” are other adjectives people attach to Hercules Pinkney.

“He has given renewed purpose to the college’s talented faculty, students and staff,” observed attorney Don Mooers (’01). “The college is back on track, and is ready to take an even more enhanced leadership role in helping to retool America’s workforce for future challenge.”