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## After 20 years at Canisius College (seven as president), John Hurley still going strong

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John Hurley doesn't lack for things to do.

The president of Canisius College is currently dealing with a significant drop in deposits for first-year students, which college leaders attribute to the state's new tuition subsidy for public colleges, dubbed the Excelsior Scholarship program.

He is also trying to finalize the Science Hall project, the Main Street building that has already seen \$68 million in renovations, and will eventually be fully renovated with a mix of philanthropy and financing.

He's looking ahead to Canisius' 150-year anniversary in 2020, which will coincide approximately with a major new capital campaign that is currently being planned. And he's in deep discussion with campus academic leaders about how the college fits in a changing community, for instance, steering its School of Education and Human Services toward high-needs urban education.

It's hard for Hurley to believe it's been 20 years since he joined Canisius as general counsel and executive vice president after a career at the Phillips Lytle law firm. He succeeded Rev. Vincent Cooke, who spent 17 years as Canisius president.

Hurley, 61, is beginning the third year of a five-year contract and has no plans of slowing down or stepping aside, saying he plans to serve out the term of that contract and stay on at least through the sesquicentennial celebration. But nor does he expect to be in the position as long as Cooke, who retired at 73 years old.

While a college is ever-changing by its nature, Hurley is still motivated by the idea that the institution changes people's lives for the better.

"It's a great honor to be the president of Canisius," said Hurley, who earned his bachelor's degree from the college in 1978. "There isn't a place I go where people don't pull me aside and tell me how Canisius made a difference in their lives, or their children's lives, or the grandchildren's lives."



JIM COURTNEY

Canisius College President John Hurley

That's not to say that Canisius has completely solved its challenging market, which involved declining numbers of local high school graduates and a national concern about costs. Canisius has lost enrollment in recent years as it stopped subsidizing large cohorts of students, and has steadily right-sized its faculty through attrition.

That's why the drop in deposits this year is a cause for concern, as the challenge at Canisius is to keep faculty costs affordable relative to its student body while retaining its classroom experience, which Hurley calls a key differentiator from the large lecture hall environment at large research universities. In the meantime, the long-term impact of Excelsior is ambiguous.

"We have to have more faculty teaching more students," Hurley said. "We have to figure out how to make things work given the new reality out there."

**Dan Miner**

Reporter

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