

# McKeown Plaza Dedication at Salem State University

July 16, 2014

*Salem State University dedicated the James L. McKeown Memorial Plaza, honoring the late "Jamie" McKeown, a magna cum laude graduate of the Class of 1977 and president of Cummings Properties from 1990 until his sudden death in 1996.*

## Bill Cummings' Remarks



President Meservey, and other staff and officials of Salem State University, members of the McKeown family, good friends...

First of all, thank you all so much for arranging this quietly festive, albeit it very damp, summer morning. Isn't this a marvelous spot to gather in remembrance of a wonderful friend, James McKeown, or "Jamie," as he was universally known?

On behalf of Jamie's wife, Denise McKeown, and his lovely daughters, Kelly and Molly

McKeown, and on behalf of everyone at Cummings Foundation, thank you, Pat, for your very warm and generous remarks.

Jamie really was a very smart and inspirational leader, but probably more than everything else, Jamie was the nice guy toward whom everyone gravitated.

Everyone trusted Jamie, for anything. And, coming from very modest means as he did, Salem State was just what he needed to get started in life.

Jamie joined Cummings Properties in early 1979, after graduating here in 1977, and then earning a master's degree in Elementary School Administration, at University of Vermont.

Teaching jobs turned out to be extremely scarce at that time, however, and I was delighted when Jamie decided to join Cummings Properties, after only about a 15-minute interview at our Woburn headquarters.

It certainly does not feel like almost 18 years now, since Jamie left us, but the years do fly by. That is almost as long as the 19 or so years Joyce and I had the profound pleasure of knowing him.

## Joyce Cummings' Remarks

We also had the distinct pleasure of getting to know Denise, well before she and Jamie were married. And I like to think I was more than a little instrumental in encouraging Jamie to propose, after he told me that Denise was "the best thing in his life."

Another of my favorite early memories about Jamie was of him carrying on about how inept some people were at raising children. This, of course, was before he had children of his own.

Personally, I thought he could use a little help, so when Denise was pregnant with Kelly, I gave Jamie a book entitled How to Raise the Perfect Child. I don't know if he ever read it, but he would certainly be so proud of Kelly and Molly and of all they have become.

Despite his degrees in education and his love of children, Jamie never did get to teach school. He satisfied some of his desire to work with kids, however, through his lifelong dedication to the Boys and Girls Club of Woburn. And Bill, as a longtime director of that great organization, had the special pleasure of nominating Jamie as the first ever alumnus to serve as a director of the Club, and then as its president.

I think it was in 1983 that Jamie was accepted to Harvard Business School. Not too demean an MBA from *any* school, but Bill wanted him to stay right where he was at Cummings Properties, and so did I.

Bill fairly soon convinced Jamie that **he** could teach him all he needed to know about business and people. A very timely book, What They Don't Teach You at Harvard Business School, had just been published, and I made sure Jamie received a copy of that one, too.

So Jamie stayed with Cummings Properties his entire career, leaving an indelible mark on the Company and his colleagues. In fact, in 1986, on behalf of the entire Cummings organization, he was the sole incorporator of Cummings Foundation, Inc.

It was especially fitting when the Foundation recently made a 10-year commitment to sponsor the University's fine program in Holocaust and genocide education here, in Jamie's honor and memory.

### **Bill Cummings' Remarks**

Jamie used his Salem State education very very well at Cummings Properties. I did not know, by the way, that he had graduated *magna cum laude*, until President Meservey informed me just a few months ago, although I was not at all surprised.

Jamie started as a leasing agent for our commercial real estate firm at a salary of \$8,000 a year. He learned very well, and rather quickly became leasing manager, and soon thereafter, vice president, executive vice president, and president of our then 200-person organization – all before he turned 36 years old.

Jamie had many other civic roles as well, including that as treasurer of the Woburn Industrial Finance Authority, and as a director of the Woburn Business Association.

In Beverly, Jamie directly spearheaded Cummings Properties' acquisition of the **United Shoe Machinery** complex. The subsequent development of Cummings Center has directly added more than 5,000 new well-paying local area jobs.

From his volunteer involvements, to his leadership in the business community, to his initiative in bringing Cummings Properties to Beverly, this member of Salem State's Class of '77 had a major impact on life today on the North Shore.

I know that I join Jamie's family in thanking you all for coming this morning, and I certainly urge you to all stay around for a brief reception. And please feel free to share any memories of the wonderful guy we all knew and loved.