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Victor Kopidlansky : Distinguished Achievement Award - Humanities

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2006 Distinguished Achievement Award - Humanities

Victor Kopidlansky '56

How did a farm boy from the Manitowoc/Green Bay area manage to speak German to the Germans, French to the French, Danish to the Danes; negotiate with such government officials as the prime minister of Malta and the finance minister of France; get arrested in Moscow during the height of the Cold War; nearly get killed in Beirut, Lebanon; teach U.S. business ethics to corporate executives in such far-flung places as Tokyo, Seoul, Bangkok, Manila, Kuala Lumpur, Singapore and Hong Kong; advise top corporate management on multi-million dollar transactions and almost manage to get appointed as a U.S. ambassador? The answers lie in the life story of Victor Kopidlansky, a 1956 St. Norbert College graduate.

Victor's lifetime work ethic began with the hard work he experienced growing up on his family's dairy farm near Cato, Wis. His strong sense of patriotism led him to serve in the U.S. Air Force during the Korean War; but this also created in him a strong propensity for the international scene. Then, along came St. Norbert College in October 1953. Two years and eight months later, he graduated with a major in philosophy, was elected to Delta Epsilon Sigma national honorary fraternity, and was chosen for inclusion in Who's Who Among Students in American Colleges and Universities. Victor was just getting started.

On to the University of Notre Dame's Medieval Institute, he earned a Master of Medieval Studies, then studied further at the University of Copenhagen on a Fulbright Scholarship, and finally obtained his law degree from Chicago's John Marshall Law School.

His career as an attorney facilitated Victor's knowledge and enjoyment of the international scene. After six years with Texaco, where he worked in international finance, Victor joined Motorola Inc., for whom he worked until his retirement in 1993.

As an international attorney, he first concentrated on Canada and South America. Then, in 1968, he managed the legal functions for all of Motorola's business in Europe and the Middle East. For his last 15 years with Motorola, Victor was corporate vice president and assistant general counsel, managing more than 80 attorneys around the globe and advising top management on worldwide legal matters. In addition, he was secretary of the Business Ethics Compliance Committee, which oversaw compliance with his company's code of conduct. Victor's success in the international business arena is due, in no little part, to his proficiency in more than a half dozen European languages.

In spite of all his travels, living abroad for nine years and living in many different cities in the U.S., Victor has managed to stay connected with his alma mater. Besides being a member of the President’s Club at St. Norbert, and having served as a member of the President’s Task Force in Chicago, he will be inducted as a Golden Knight on October 14. And as the college’s fifth visiting alumni fellow, he met with several classes this fall to share his experiences in the corporate world and, particularly, in international business.

When Victor met with students recently, his advice to them was, don’t “be concerned if you don’t have the highest IQ. A high IQ will help, but it won’t get you where you want to go. What counts is dedication and hard work.”

St. Norbert College

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