

LEADING LE MOYNE

LINDA LEMURA,
THE DAUGHTER OF
IMMIGRANTS,
TAKES THE HELM
AT JESUIT COLLEGE

| BY RENÉE K. GADOUA

The weekend before Le Moyne College officials planned to announce they were naming Syracuse native Linda LeMura college president, a priest at Our Lady of Pompei/St. Peter Church spilled the beans during Mass.

LeMura's 86-year-old mother turned to her for an explanation.

"I never told her I was being considered," LeMura says. "I didn't want to disappoint her if I didn't get it."

As the congregation — men and women alike — stood and applauded, LeMura began to comprehend the significance of being named the first lay woman in the world to lead a Jesuit college or university. The feeling intensified a few days later, when the college formally introduced LeMura as its next president at its Panasci Family Chapel, which was packed for the event. ▶

Le Moyne College President Linda LeMura is pictured in the new addition to Le Moyne's Coyne Science Center. LeMura, who has degrees in biology and applied physiology, had a hand in selecting the Jesuit scientists that are showcased in the display behind her.

PHOTOGRAPH BY ELLEN M. BLALOCK



Linda LeMura and her siblings and mother. Shown are LeMura, far left, sister Joanne, brother Joe (in back), mother Mary, sister Lena, brother Armand and sister Lisa.



PHOTOGRAPHS COURTESY OF THE LEMURA FAMILY

A family vacation in Sicily. Linda LeMura and her daughter, Emily, are sitting on the base of a statue. Her husband, Lawrence Tanner, is standing.



"I never thought I would see a woman lead a Jesuit institution in my lifetime," LeMura says in early July, days after she officially became the college's 14th president. "I was so overcome by the responsibility of this as part of the evolution of the church."

Her appointment comes as the Catholic Church experiences a continuing decline in the number of priests and an increased need for lay Catholics to take on leadership positions in church organizations.

Her historic role leading a Catholic, Jesuit college is not lost on LeMura. "I recognize that the path of my leadership will clear a path for other women," she says. "There are significant implications in how I steer this institution."

But an equally strong storyline about her appointment is at least as important to her. She is the local kid made good — the daughter of immigrant parents and a first-generation college student who succeeded in achieving the American dream of a good education and successful career.

"I am that kid," LeMura says.

Mary and James LeMura moved here from Catania, Italy, not far from the Sicilian city of Syracuse, in 1950. The couple arrived with two daughters, no English and a pile of dreams.

"The church would deliver bags of food to our home," LeMura says of her modest upbringing on Syracuse's North Side, where many Italian immigrants lived. The family had "a gorgeous Victorian home" on North Townsend Street, near St. Joseph's Hospital Health Center.

Her parents had four more children, a total of four girls and two boys. Linda LeMura is the second youngest.

Her father worked at Marsellus Casket Co. as a carpenter; he later worked at Crucible Steel. LeMura says her father bought older homes, fixed them up and sold them. Her mother was a homemaker until 1983, when her husband died. The couple never used credit cards and modeled a strong work ethic.



PHOTOGRAPH BY CHARLES WAINWRIGHT

Education was "non-negotiable," LeMura says. "There was nothing more important than the six of us getting the best education we could."

All six kids went to Catholic schools in the Syracuse Diocese. "My parents gave up a lot for us," LeMura says.

Five of the siblings chose careers in education or social work; one brother is a lawyer. Five of them live in Central New York — LeMura's brother, Joseph, lives six houses down from her in Sedgwick. Her mother lives a few blocks away; mother and daughter speak by phone every day.

Family gatherings are "very lively, spirited, people talking at the same time," LeMura says. "When it's quiet, you have to worry." Get-togethers mean lots of "really spectacular food" her mother still cooks.

LeMura graduated from Bishop Grimes High School. Thanks to her experience playing ▶

Mary LeMura, Linda LeMura's mother, center, pauses in prayer at the announcement of her daughter Linda being named the first lay woman to lead a Jesuit college or university.



PHOTOGRAPHS COURTESY OF THE LEMURA FAMILY

FAR LEFT, Linda LeMura and her newborn daughter, Emily, who is now a student at Fordham University.

LEFT, Linda LeMura (in pigtails) with her sister Lisa in the early 1960s.



Linda LeMura still has some basketball skills. She played in high school for Bishop Grimes and for Niagara University as an undergraduate.



PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF THE LEMURA FAMILY

PHOTOGRAPH BY JOHN BERRY

basketball with her brothers, she excelled athletically as well as academically. Her skills led to an athletic scholarship to Niagara University, a Catholic school near Buffalo.

At Niagara, she earned a bachelor's degree in biology and education. She then earned a master's degree and doctorate in applied physiology from Syracuse University. From 1995 to 2003, she taught and researched at Bloomsburg University in Pennsylvania, where she became an expert in pediatric obesity.

LeMura's husband, Lawrence Tanner, teaches in Le Moyne's biological sciences department. Their daughter, Emily Tanner, is a junior at Fordham University, also a Jesuit school.

LeMura had been the highest-ranking woman at Le Moyne since she was named provost in 2007. Before that, she was the college's dean of arts and sciences.

Although she grew up about four miles from Le Moyne, she never set foot on cam-

pus until she interviewed for the dean position in 2003. Her experience parallels that of many immigrant families, she says.

"My family knew so little about college," she says. "We had no role models, no knowledge of college options or how the system works."

Since its founding in 1946, Le Moyne has attracted first-generation college students. A third of today's 3,300 students follow that tradition.

"It's an opportunity I want to preserve because of the impact Catholic higher education can have," LeMura says. "I see the students we serve and I see their potential."

LeMoyne's philosophy, and her love of Syracuse, convinced her to accept the president's job in April. At the time, she was set to take over as president of LaSalle University in Philadelphia, a Catholic university in the tradition of the Brothers of the Christian Schools. About the same time, the college's board of trustees learned that Fred Pestello, president since 2008, was leaving to become the first permanent lay president at St. Louis University, a Jesuit school in St. Louis, Mo.

The board worried that losing Pestello and LeMura would create a leadership void. So the trustees bypassed a national search and, within a few days of Pestello's announcement, offered LeMura the presidential spot.

The LaSalle job was tempting, LeMura admits, citing the lure of doctoral programs and Division I athletics. But, "through prayer, through Ignatian contemplation, I decided this >



Linda LeMura chats with Sister Anacitus, who was retiring as a teacher at Our Lady of Pompei. LeMura attended the school and is still a member of the parish.



PHOTOGRAPHS COURTESY OF THE LEMURA FAMILY

The Rev. Paul Angelicchio, a priest at Our Lady of Pompei, poses with, from left, Mary LeMura, Emily Tanner, Linda LeMura and Lawrence Tanner.

Lawrence Tanner and Linda LeMura with their daughter, Emily Tanner.



PHOTOGRAPHS COURTESY OF THE LEMURA FAMILY

Mary LeMura with her first four children in the 1950s. Linda LeMura was born in 1959 after this photo was taken. Mary LeMura and her husband, James, moved from Catania, Italy, to Syracuse in 1950. James LeMura died in 1983.



institution needed me at this time," she says. She values the chance to help other children of immigrants succeed as she has.

"Le Moyne is an institution that builds bridges between the past and future aspirations of immigrant families and personal and career success," she says. "Le Moyne has always represented opportunities for people. It's precisely what the church had in mind in educating people."

LeMura has long worked for changes that make Le Moyne's education relevant to a changing society. She's credited with shepherding a new core curriculum, which now requires students to take math and science courses. She also helped create the Madden School of Business and assisted in the renovation and expansion of the college's science facilities.

John Smarrelli, a Syracuse native and 1975 Le Moyne graduate who was interim president from 2007 to 2008, admires LeMura's work ethic and style.

"I saw a passion and a sparkle," says Smarrelli, who is the first permanent lay president of Christian Brothers University in Memphis, Tenn. "She wasn't going to be an ivory tower administrator. She was going to get her hands dirty and do the work."

She's been successful in connecting the college to other colleges and to the community. And she's committed to the college's values, Smarrelli says.

"She's going to do things that show this college is Catholic and that this college is Jesuit," he says.

It didn't take her long to show that. Less than three weeks into her presidency, LeMura sent a letter to alumni voicing her support for Syracuse Mayor Stephanie Miner's offer to house immigrant children in Syracuse's former Maria Regina College.

"I am a living example of the potential all immigrants have for shaping and enriching this nation," she wrote. "And my strong Catholic faith calls for all of us to treat all of God's children with compassion and care."

Lauren Kochian, a niece who is director of marketing and development for Arc of Onondaga, says LeMura models the possibilities for children of immigrants — and women. She recently saw her aunt in professional mode when LeMura met with representatives of Arc to discuss possible programs that would link Arc's clients, who have developmental disabilities, with the college.

"Linda kept saying, 'This is part of our mission. This is why we're here,'" Kochian says. "It was a proud moment for me as a niece, plus she's valuing what I do, which is to value people with developmental disabilities and making people understand why that matters."

LeMura is enthusiastic about facing the challenges of being a female leader and the role the college can play in a changing Catholic Church.

"I know people will be watching me," she says.

Among her audience will be the women at her church, many of them immigrants or children of immigrants. When the priest told the congregation of her impending appointment, some of the older women began crying.

"We've waited our whole life for this," one of the women explained. Please don't screw this up or they'll never give us another chance. Make us proud."

That, LeMura says, is precisely what she intends to do. ❖

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PHOTOGRAPH BY DICK BLUME



PHOTOGRAPH BY JENNIFER MEYERS

ABOVE, Linda LeMura, left, with Dennis and Mary Rose Guiry. LeMura attended Niagara University with Dennis Guiry. Their son Brian will be a freshman this fall at Le Moyne.

LEFT, Linda LeMura, then provost at Le Moyne, chats with Larry Apgar, of Pompey, at the 2007 Founders' Day gala.

BELOW KEFT, Linda LeMura talks to incoming freshman Brian Guiry during orientation at Le Moyne.



PHOTOGRAPH BY DICK BLUME



PHOTOGRAPH BY ELLEN M. BLALOCK

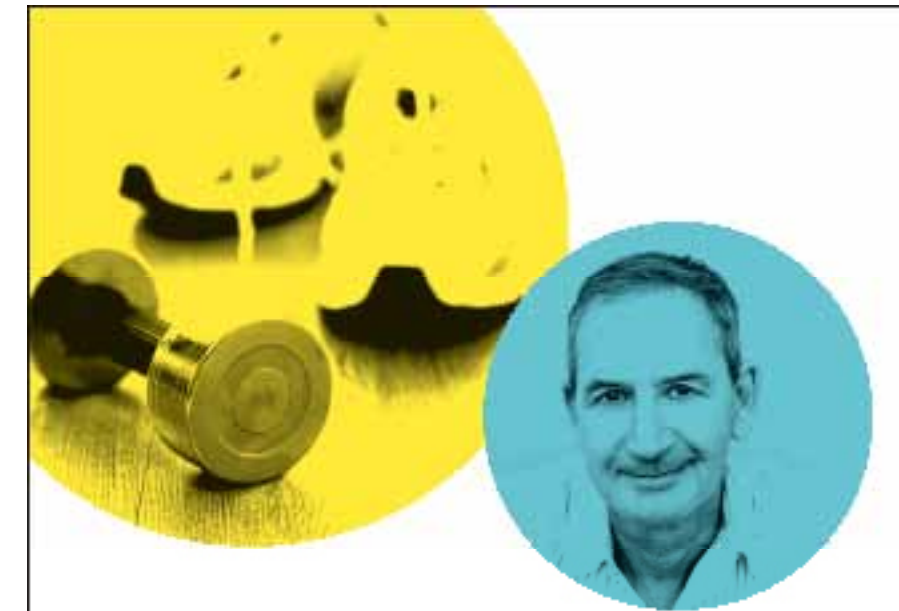
Linda LeMura on

◆ **On her relationship with the Jesuits:** “I was fascinated by the number of craters on the moon named after Jesuits. (There are 35.) That they could merge reason and faith was not lost on me. I respect the interdisciplinary approach to understanding the grandeur of God.”

◆ **On inviting controversial speakers, such as someone who supports abortion rights, to campus:** “We’re always going to be open to various perspectives. We would present a pro-choice speaker only if the opposing view was presented and we clearly presented the church’s view and were open to debate. I would let the ordinary (the bishop) know.”

◆ **On the “women can have it all” debate:** “To say we can have it all is a disservice and forces us into situations that are untenable. Having a family and vigorous career at the same time are not possible. There are only so many hours in the day. Thinking you can have it all causes immense stress and creates false expectations.”

◆ **On what her appointment means to students:** “I’d like to model that it’s not unusual for a female to lead a Jesuit institution. Once this class graduates, they will have only known a woman president. Every graduate from the beginning has known a male president.”



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