

# Tiny college thrives without government help

By RALPH R. ECHEINAW  
STAFF WRITER

With sizeable, high-profile schools like Oakland University and Oakland Community College just around the corner, it's easy to ignore a small liberal arts junior college like Michigan Christian.

Oakland University enrolls about 12,000 students every year. OCC harbors 30,000 now and adds more every year. Michigan Christian College, serenely situated on a wooded, 60-acre patch of earth in Rochester Hills, serves all of 301 students in the current semester and entertains lofty goals of boosting that to 500 by the year 2000. And with admission requests running 65 percent ahead of last year's pace, that shouldn't be difficult.

Formerly one of two summer homes belonging to Detroit ad man Lou Maxon, the property was sold to the college in the late 1950s. According to MCC spokesman Larry Stewart, Maxon was told by the IRS that he could take a tax deduction on only one of his summer homes. So he sold the estate on Avon Road just east of Livernois, and MCC began holding classes in 1959, predating OCC's birth by six years.

"At that time a lot of people thought this location was too far from Detroit," Stewart said. "Now it's just right."

Loosely affiliated with the fiercely independent Church of Christ, MCC is likewise associated with 16 other like-minded colleges across the country.

## A wee junior college

In the age of the state-subsidized, millage-supported community college and an increasingly secular society, a wee junior college with a strong Christian framework seems like an anachronism, but MCC appears to be getting along just fine.

Four-year degrees like Bible studies, Christian ministry and counseling have been added to the curriculum since 1990, and a four-year business program is in the pipeline now.

Tuition tends to run a little high (\$2,400 a semester, plus \$1,500 for room and board), but 70 percent of the students live on campus, and 17 percent of the students are minorities.

With a \$3 million annual budget, MCC is almost debt free, Stewart said, and hopes to build a larger library and a new gymnasium.

About one-fourth of MCC's revenue is provided by donations. A group of boosters called the Associates of MCC, comprised mostly of older alumni, raises about \$100,000 a year on MCC's behalf.

The college's biggest problem might be public relations. Many people, Stewart said, believe MCC does nothing but train future preachers.

Granted, that's part of the mission, and courses such as "Introduction to Preaching" are offered, but 85-90 percent of the students are simply bent on getting two-year liberal arts degrees, then transferring to a larger school.

## No booze allowed

That's not to say there isn't a strong Christian atmosphere, however. Prospective teachers must be Christians or they don't get hired. Students and teachers are required to attend a short worship service daily. And no alcohol is allowed on campus.

Many mainstream college students and a like number of college teachers may cringe at that prospect, but MCC students like it that way.

Student Melissa Schroeder, a Rochester Hills resident, enjoys knowing almost everyone else on campus. She also takes classes at Oakland University and notes the difference. "You get used to saying 'Hi' and greeting people (at MCC)," she said. "I said 'Hi' to someone over there (at OU) and they just looked at me."

Said Stewart, "It's a lot harder to get lost in the shuffle here."

Freshman Alex Lilmatta is a second generation MCC student. His parents, Anne and Fred, met each other at MCC and got married.

A proud conservative Republican, Lilmatta dropped out of the West Point Military Academy after two months last year and switched to MCC. One of the college's strong points, Lilmatta said, is that professors with doctorate degrees actually teach classes. At bigger universities, he noted, professors with such stellar credentials write books while graduate assistants teach.

## Big happy family

Jeanie Fazekas, a home economics major, said she attends MCC "because of the Christian atmosphere and for spiritual growth. It's like a big family here."

And what's more important to a big family than a big yard to play in?

Unlike Oakland University, where the large buildings are mainly surrounded by sidewalks and parking lots, MCC's campus is a rather idyllic setting with plenty of woods, trails and even a small lake.

A former gravel pit, the lake is too mucky for swimming, Stewart said, "but every once in a while somebody gets thrown in for a joke and they don't smell too good when they come out."

The lake's residents are mostly big turtles with shells approaching three feet in diameter. In the 1960s, Stewart said, the college tried to stock the lake with swans and ducks, but they were eaten by the turtles.



STAFF PHOTOS BY JOE HEDDER

I saw the light: The daily worship service at the college is sometimes lamented by students, Stewart said, but it serves to bond them with each other and with their teachers, whose attendance is also required.



All together now: Michigan Christian College hymn leader Matt Morningstar, right, leads students in song Monday at the daily worship service, among them Terry Leabhart, 21, of Monroe (above).



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