

# *Foreword*

I promise to try as well as I can to succeed in college, to learn my subject well, and to learn how to teach and inspire children. I promise to work to become a role model others would be proud to emulate. I promise these goals in the name of my family, by whose example I arrived at this time and place in my life. I promise these goals in the name of the children I have yet to meet and those who died or were lost before I was ready to help them.

It is April 9, 2005, and in a large auditorium in Chicago one hundred young people rise from their seats and verbally together repeat this pledge. Most are high school seniors; a few are sophomores in college. All are committing themselves to becoming teachers in Illinois's schools of need. Their eyes are riveted on the man at the podium who is leading their recitation, Dominic Belmonte.

The auditorium is filled with their families, friends, teachers, and principals. As Dom Belmonte introduces them individually and they ascend the stage, each is greeted by applause, cheers, and whistles. This is not a football banquet, nor a musical production—the whoops and hollers of enthusiasm and pride are for teaching careers.

The students are back in their seats now, and on this warm spring evening Dom Belmonte extols them and inspires them with words about the wonders and rewards of teaching. He will also be there to help them prepare for the cold winter days to come, when they will face the inevitable obstacles and hurdles of this most challenging of professions.

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Mike and I first met Dom in 1987 when he was one of ten high school teachers selected to receive the Golden Apple Award for Excellence in Teaching. We had created the Foundation two years

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before for many reasons, but primarily because we were witnesses to the loss of respect for teachers. When we were young we held teachers in the highest regard, and the change in their status was ominous to us. An offspring of the Foundation was the creation of the Golden Apple Academy into which all winners of the award have been inducted. It is a vehicle for bringing cohesion, visibility, and empowerment to the ideas of these special teachers. Dom quickly became a leader in the Academy, and when an idea surfaced of recruiting bright, ambitious high school students into teaching, he ran with it. The Golden Apple Scholars of Illinois became the Foundation's largest program. In 1996, he retired from York Community High School where he had taught for twenty years and was Chairman of the English Department to join the Golden Apple Foundation as Director of Teacher Preparation.

In this second career, Dom administrates a Summer Institute, lobbies legislators in Springfield, cajoles Chicago Public School officials, orates from his bully pulpit, and, of course, continues his deepest love—teaching.

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He stands now in front of this year's crop of eager seventeen- and eighteen-year-olds. He tells them like it is. That they'll have to live with the old, hurtful platitudes:

“You're so smart. Why do you want to be a teacher?”

“Those who can't do, teach.”

He tells them that obviously they are smart or they wouldn't be here. Smarts aren't enough for their chosen path. They'll need sensitivity, resolve, creativity, persistence, and resiliency, to name just a few of the qualities required of great teachers. They, after all, will have the unique opportunity of changing lives and—all too often in the schools in which they have pledged to teach—of saving lives.

The ceremony is ending, and the hundred newly minted Golden Apple Scholars file out. They now join the eight hundred others who have come through the Foundation, four hundred who are teaching in Illinois schools and another four hundred who are in colleges and universities preparing for those classrooms.

Dom Belmonte has left his mark on every one of them—and on us.

Patricia and Martin Koldyke  
Founders of the Golden Apple Foundation  
for Excellence in Teaching