

Honorary doctorate bestowed on president of Ireland

May 1, 1999

Mary McAleese, eighth president of Ireland, received an honorary doctorate of humane letters May 7 from RIT. She was honored for her work promoting peace and her commitment to civil rights and the rights of the disabled.

McAleese, whose brother is deaf, has a longstanding interest in deaf education. She introduced a sign-language program into solicitors' training in Northern Ireland, the first such course in European legal training. While at RIT, McAleese toured NTID and expressed her hope that Ireland will someday have a college for the deaf.

"Until we as a world wake up to the fact that genius is not the preserve of a particular creed, color or social class, that it is not confined to those who can see or hear, or to those who are able-bodied, until we realize that, our world will be the poorer for the genius we keep locked up," she said.

A former Roman Catholic law professor, McAleese made history by becoming the first person from Northern Ireland to be elected head of state. Her victory in the 1997 presidential election was by the largest majority ever in Ireland's presidential elections.