

A Lion's Share of History

A glimpse into The Robert David Lion Gardiner Foundation, SJC's generous benefactor

By David Henne

FOR NEARLY A DECADE, THE PRESIDENTIAL LECTURE AT ST. JOSEPH'S COLLEGE HAS brought prominent guests to the College who have not only lived history, but helped shape it. Most recently, documentary filmmaker Rory Kennedy provided an inside look into her work, with the 2017 lecture "The Camera Doesn't Lie: Social Change Through Documentary Filmmaking."

This was the second-annual Presidential Lecture at SJC after a four-year hiatus. It's a series made possible through The Robert David Lion Gardiner Foundation. Established in 1987, the foundation seeks to educate and inform the general public in New York state — and Suffolk County in particular — concerning culture, art and history.

Kathryn M. Curran, executive director of The Robert David Lion Gardiner Foundation, knows the value of local history in Suffolk County. Formerly the executive director of the Suffolk County Historical Society, Ms. Curran joined the foundation in 2015 with ambitions to grow the foundation to eventually help organizations statewide.

"My vision is to make this [foundation] a role model for local history grant giving on a national level," Ms. Curran told the *Long Island Advance* newspaper in 2015.

Ms. Curran's mother Rachel Siller (née Scarpati) graduated from St. Joseph's College in 1934.

The mission of The Robert David Lion Gardiner Foundation is to cultivate, foster and promote interest in, and understanding and appreciation of, the societal heritage of the Town of Islip, particularly during the 19th century, according to its website (rdlgfoundation.org). The foundation also encourages and sponsors the creation and perpetuation by existing and future historical societies of collections and repositories for the deposit, collection and examination of documents and artifacts of various kinds relevant to such heritage and traditions.

In addition to supporting the Presidential Lecture at St. Joseph's College, the foundation has funded a professorship of New York history at Columbia University, supported the restoration of the Vanderbilt Museum on Long Island and created a college scholarship for graduating high school seniors in the Town of Islip who are pursuing the study of history.

Looking to the future, it's clear to see why St. Joseph's is excited about its partnership with The Robert David Lion Gardiner Foundation. Bringing historically significant voices to our campus helps make our students brighter and more aware of the wider world. 