

FROM THE BRAFFERTON

The Matter of the Mascot

“Get me the Griffin,” I finally cried as our quest for a new mascot breathed its last. The quest had lasted longer than the gestation of a mastodon. It was time to decide. My vote for the Griffin has borne gratifying fruit. Every time the beast has appeared on campus, hearts and minds have melted. I relish the prospect of the Griffin unleashed next fall in Zable Stadium, Kaplan Arena and other promising venues.

Now, it's well to be clear that the mascot is only one of three related symbols. They often get confused, though they are actually quite distinct. Let me try to shed some light. We have, first, William and Mary's nickname; second, our logo; and third, our mascot.

The College's nickname has been THE TRIBE for a long time. It is still THE TRIBE. This did not change with the selection of a new mascot. Nor did the NCAA trifle with our nickname. Our cry remains “GO TRIBE!” Our cry has not become, “Go Griffins.” We are the Tribe.

On the other hand, the College's logo did change after the NCAA proscribed its feathers. There are now several variations of the logo, all featherless. The most prominent is a bare “WM.” Our recent quest for a new

mascot had nothing to do with the logo. After a rocky start, the featherless logos seem to be getting some traction, though for many alumni the old “WM with feathers” will remain the only true logo. That, however, is a story for another day.

Then there is the mascot. Our penultimate mascot was Colonel Ebirt (that's Tribe spelled backwards). The Colonel was an enormous green blob topped by a tri-cornered hat. He retired in 2005, is now living happily in the islands, and has no interest in re-entering the mascot business. When I became president, there were two mascot issues: (1) whether to search for an Ebirt replacement (some felt there was no need — fine to go mascot-less) and (2) if we were to seek a new mascot, how to go about the search (most advised a transparent, inclusive effort). I felt we should give it a try even though the likelihood of finding a mascot that, in concept, could command a consensus was remote. I also opted to invite all comers to participate in a very open process. More than 800 people submitted mascot proposals, 300 of them discrete. There were more than 22,000 comments on the five finalists. Our hardworking mascot search committee (15 students, faculty, staff and alumni) engaged all suggestions and com-



ments. It was a remarkably thorough process, and, thanks to the wonders of the Internet, it was quite transparent. For more details, see the article on page 38.

We emerged with a beast, half-eagle and half-lion, that looks great on pins, T-shirts and in costume. Being part lion, our Griffin evokes the College's royal origins in Britain. Being part eagle, the beast evokes the College's seminal role in American history. The lion speaks to William and Mary's strength and willingness to take on all comers, while the eagle evokes our vision and capacity to soar. From ancient times, griffins have guarded precious treasure. The *alma mater* of a nation is precious treasure for our Griffin to guard.

When the new mascot was rolled out to the campus community in Kaplan Arena, the response was enthusiastic. The beast has since gone to the spring football game, visited with the members of our Board of Visitors and the trustees of the William and Mary Foundation, and appeared in a number of other places, winning great acclaim. While people most passionately committed to other proposed mascots may never truly warm to the Griffin, experience to date suggests that most alumni and friends will. It's a winsome beast with strong ties to William and Mary.

So, welcome Griffin! May you rouse the Tribe to new heights. May you guard our treasured College well.

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President, College of William and Mary

To see the Griffin in action and to learn more about the mascot search, please visit www.wm.edu/mascot.

