Text of Remarks by Dr. Frederick Burkhardt at Naming-Ceremony for Fiorello H. LaGuardia Community College - December 5, 1970

I am pleased to welcome all of you here to celebrate the naming of Community College Number Nine of The City University of New York. I am particularly pleased to welcome members of the LaGuardia Memorial Association who have just concluded their annual meeting.

As Chairman of the Board of Higher Education, I am honored to announce that Community College Number Nine of The City University will be known officially as Fiorello H. LaGuardia Community College.

We are most grateful to the LaGuardia family for their permission to use the late Mayor's name for this new college. Indeed, it is most fitting that this new community college, which will offer an experimental work-study program to all of its students, should be named for Mayor LaGuardia. He knew so well the meaning of both working and studying. Without the usual undergraduate preparation, he earned his law degree at night at New York University while working by day in a variety of jobs, such as a steamship company clerk, a stenographer at Abercrombie and Fitch, and as an interpreter at Ellis Island.

The discipline that such a schedule required served Fiorello LaGuardia well. The career of "The Little Flower" was filled with color as well as daring, innovation and courage. He entered politics as a New York City alderman in 1919 after attaining distinction in the Air Corps during World War I. He was elected to Congress in 1922—the first Italian-American to serve there—and then was re-elected for five consecutive terms. In
Congress he was known as a "Progressive" and was responsible for the passage of what is known as "Labor's Magna Carta": the Norris-LaGuardia Act, which guaranteed Labor's right to collective bargaining.

He ran for Mayor of New York in 1929, but was defeated. He also lost his bid for re-election to Congress in 1932. For many, this would have signalled the end of a political career.

However, in 1934 "The Little Flower" became the 99th mayor of New York. He was re-elected three times, and during those 12 years, he pleased New Yorkers with a relentless fight against the underworld and he inspired voters with the moral, financial, administrative and physical rehabilitation through which he put the City Government. He is also credited with steps that led to the city colleges emerging from being only locally known institutions to colleges nationally prominent for their scholarly excellence. This he achieved by searching for persons of outstanding abilities, regardless of political affiliations, to serve on the Board of Higher Education. These members, in turn, recruited outstanding college presidents who fostered the growth of three city colleges into the vast City University of today, of which Fiorello H. LaGuardia Community College takes its place as the twentieth institution.

Mayor LaGuardia was committee to the role higher education should play in the life of the city and voiced a hope that future legislators would be drawn from the colleges, and not from the political clubs. He declared that
"quality of a college is not the quality of its buildings," but he was successful in obtaining Public Works Administration funds from Harold Ickes for the construction of Brooklyn College's 27-acre landscaped campus and Hunter College's present quarters on Park Avenue.

Perhaps he foresaw open admissions when he said in 1939: "Advanced education today is a responsibility of government and something that every boy and girl ought to get."

It was also with Mayor LaGuardia's help that the city colleges started attracting better qualified faculty members. When he took office, large numbers of the instructional staff were called "tutors" and were paid $1,000 a year, or less. He supported the tenure law for the colleges--the first of its kind in the country--which also established a scale of salary advancement and a structure of professorial ranks for the faculty.

The visionary mayor helped improve the quality of life in New York City in still other ways. It was he who in 1935 established in New York the first housing project in the United States. And it was he who first hired Robert Moses to reorganize the City's parks and recreation programs. New hospitals, a strengthened welfare system and the Health Insurance Program for City employees were also among his achievements, and these are still benefiting New Yorkers.

At this point I would like to ask Mrs. Marie LaGuardia to come forward.
Mrs. LaGuardia, on behalf of the Board of Higher Education, I would like to present this scroll to you as written record of today's occasion. I will read the text:

More than a great Mayor, Fiorello H. LaGuardia personified the resurgence of New York City as a world metropolis.

In a time of despair he gave the people of our City the spirit to fight and the will to prevail. Throughout his historic mayoralty, Fiorello LaGuardia acknowledged and enhanced the City's commitment to public higher education as a vital force in assuring the economic prosperity and cultural enrichment of its citizens.

In recognition of his many contributions to higher education in the City of New York, and of his example as a fearless, wise and compassionate leader of men, the Board of Higher Education of the City of New York is proud to commemorate his name by officially designating this important new unit of the City University as

FIORELLO H. LaGUARDIA COMMUNITY COLLEGE

5 December 1970