Editorial: Macalester/A gem turns 130

It would be un-Minnesotan to boast too brassily about a mere 130th birthday this week, while another St. Paul liberal arts college (Hamline) is observing its 150th. And Macalester College, for all its renown, is decidedly Minnesotan. But let it not go unnoticed that 130 years ago today, Gov. Cushman K. Davis signed a charter fulfilling the dream of pioneer educator Edward Duffield Neill and his Philadelphia benefactor, Charles Macalester, of creating a small liberal arts college of excellence, rivaling the best schools of the East, to educate civic leaders in the fast-growing Upper Midwest.

They succeeded spectacularly. Macalester College is consistently rated among the top 25 liberal arts colleges in the nation. Nearly 60 percent of its graduates earn an advanced degree within six years of graduation.

Let it be further noted that on Saturday, Macalester will inaugurate its 16th president, Brian Rosenberg. A native New Yorker, Dickens scholar and former dean of Lawrence University in Appleton, Wis., Rosenberg appreciates Macalester's Minnesota modesty and unpretentiousness.

But Rosenberg also wants Macalester and Minnesota to better appreciate how good each is for the other. Macalester is one of only a handful of high-quality American liberal arts colleges situated in an urban environment. Its commitment to community service, internationalism and cultural diversity sets it apart from its peers, and connects its program to the larger community. Its students draw from Twin Cities resources -- and then many of them give back, staying in Minnesota permanently. Only 19 percent of Macalester's 1,850 students this year are native Minnesotans. But if they are like their predecessors, more than half of them will remain in this state.

In a state blessed with many fine academic institutions, Macalester is a gem. May its celebration this weekend be sparkling.

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