

Critic of college seeks reforms

Melfa: Holy Cross too secular

By Emilie Astell
TELEGRAM & GAZETTE STAFF

WORCESTER — Westboro resident Victor J. Melfa readily says that if his unwavering belief in the Catholic religion makes him eccentric, so be it.

For a man who seemed to come out of nowhere early this year when he waged a battle against the College of the Holy Cross for allowing the play "The Vagina Monologues" to be performed on campus on Ash Wednesday, Mr. Melfa is making a name for himself.

His criticism of his alma mater runs deep. He believes the school has strayed far from its Catholic heritage and is more secular than it should be. He would like to see a return to the religious values he learned as a student during the 1950s, the same code outlined in *Ex corde Ecclesiae*, a document issued by Pope John Paul II in 1990 that lays out the identity and mission of Catholic colleges.

"We are successful," Mr. Melfa said of the Holy Cross Car-



T&G Staff/BETTY JENEWIN

Victor J. Melfa of Westboro will be honored Saturday in Washington, D.C., by the Cardinal Newman Society.

dinal Newman Society he founded this year. The society espouses the same goals found

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'Monologues' performance spurred Melfa's activism

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in Ex corde.

"Holy Cross is listening, though they'll deny it," he continued. "I know alumni are listening and supporting us strongly with money and time."

His words fall on both sides of the debate. Supporters believe the school, which did not allow female students until 1972, needs to return to its Catholic roots, according to letters written by alumni who graduated three or more decades ago. College administrators say the school meets the goals of Ex corde while educating students for the 21st century.

Mr. Melfa, who will be 67 Wednesday, is CEO and owner of The Training Associates Corp. on Route 9 in Shrewsbury, a company that provides technical trainers to information technology training centers and to businesses.

He has a bachelor's degree in physics from Holy Cross, a master's degree in the same field from Columbia University and an MBA from Northeastern University. He has worked at the Los Alamos National Laboratory and the Naval Research Laboratory and as an adjunct professor at Boston University and Boston College.

He routinely updates the society's Web site, www.hccns.org, and appears to be invigorated by his support. He talks of his religious beliefs with fervor, saying that the pope is a successor of Peter, one of Christ's apostles.

"It's taken me 67 years to realize even Catholics don't understand that," he said at his office Thursday.

The businessman enjoyed scrolling through his Web site for a visitor, ruminating over his organizational skills in setting up the society and the following he appears to have.

As a result of his efforts, he is being honored in Washington Saturday with a 2002 Ex corde Ecclesiae Award from the national Cardinal Newman Society for his contributions to the renewal of Catholic higher education. The national society is separate from the Holy Cross group, he said.

and never has been particularly involved as an alumnus in the life of the college," said the Rev. Michael C. McFarland, Jesuit president of the college, in a prepared statement released Friday.

"The Cardinal Newman Society is a fringe group and they don't represent the mainstream of Catholic education," he said. "That said, it's an entirely appropriate award for Vic Melfa to receive because the group, like Mr. Melfa, works to cynically manipulate the truth and to impose a narrow, right-wing agenda on Catholic higher education."

The college has a strong Catholic theology faculty, the president has said in earlier interviews, and teaches a commitment to justice throughout the curriculum.

Patrick J. Reilly, founder and president of the national society, said Mr. Melfa was chosen for the award because of his leadership in seeking reforms at the college. Last year, a group of students who published a Catholic campus newspaper at Boston College was honored, he said Friday.

"Vic is a model for other alumni of Catholic colleges who are concerned that changes during the past 40 years have produced dissenting faculties, declining academic standards and stu-

dent behavior that is far removed from Christian living," Mr. Reilly said in a press release.

As for production of the "Monologues" play on campus, Rev. McFarland has said he allowed the play to be staged because it has value, although it is not the means he would choose to convey the message. The play will be performed on campus again in February.

"The Vagina Monologues" examines female sexuality and sexual abuse of women, such as rape and domestic violence. While Mr. Melfa's criticisms of the play include such words as "pornographic," he decided to watch a videotape of the play before attending an open forum at Holy Cross. His harshest criticism of the campus production was that it took place on a holy day in the Lenten calendar.

His objections to the play were the catalyst for him to organize the local society, but he admits that, like other alumni, he should have paid attention to the college much sooner than he did.

He also believes the school has become secular to attract more students and to increase contributions by alumni.

"Holy Cross would lose standing in the eyes of the world if it became a Catholic school," he said.

