

PROFILE: **TOM
MONAGHAN**

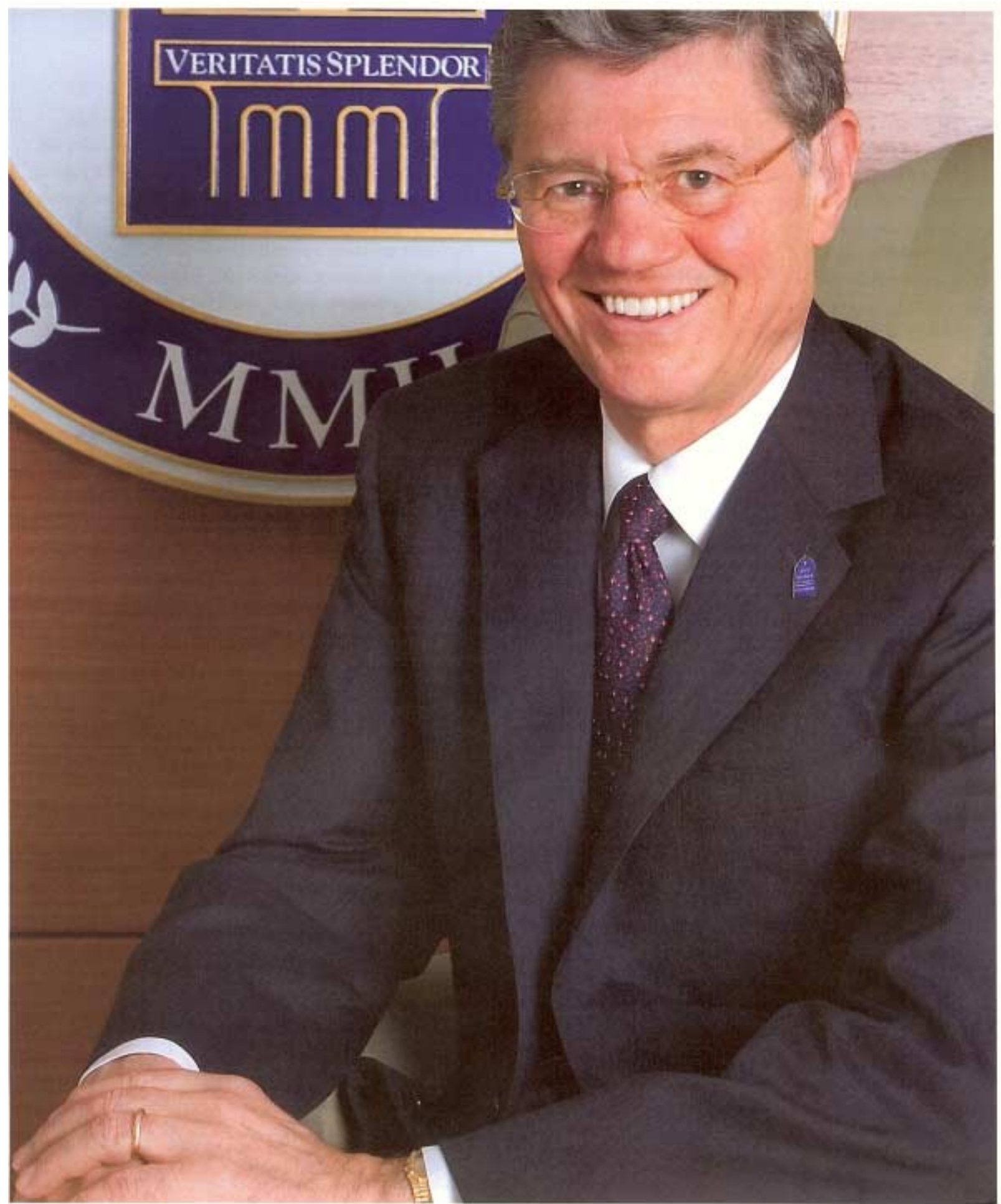
FOUNDER OF AVE MARIA UNIVERSITY
AND DOMINO'S PIZZA

AS A CHILD, TOM MONAGHAN WANTED TO BE AN ARCHITECT, A SHORTSTOP FOR THE DETROIT TIGERS AND A PRIEST WHEN HE GREW UP. IN A ROUND-ABOUT WAY, HE REALIZED EACH OF THOSE DREAMS, ALTHOUGH IN A MANNER HIS YOUNG MIND COULD NEVER HAVE IMAGINED.

by **MARLO SOLLITTO**

photography by **NICK SHIRGHIO** and courtesy of **AVE MARIA FOUNDATION**

Editor's note: *The face of Naples is changing, its evidence easily seen with each passing season. As our historians rush to record fast-fading memories, the future knocks frantically at our door. For our part, **en** has chosen to highlight individuals who have straddled the line that connects the two: those whose past has influenced the Naples of today and those whose imprint is just on the other side of future's door. This is the fourth in our series of profiles.*



He never formally became an architect, but he studies it as a hobby and is masterminding the design of Ave Maria University in eastern Collier County, including the campus' centerpiece: a Faves Jones inspired oratory which Monaghan first sketched drawings of on a tablecloth at a Naples restaurant. He never played for the Detroit Tigers, but he bought the team and watched with awe as his childhood favorite team won the World Series the following year. He never became a priest (though he did attend seminary) but his deep faith in God has been a driving force in his life and today he contributed much of the funding to build the nation's first new Catholic university in 40 years in Collier County, one that will be "faithful to the teachings of the church, while offering the highest academic standards."

When the first phase of construction is complete (slated for 2007) Ave Maria will have state-of-the-art academic facilities, a technology center, a student recreation building, activities center, sports and recreation field, five undergraduate dormitories, three graduate dorms and a library/research center.

Zoning is simultaneously underway on land adjacent to campus, where a town bearing the university's name is planned, with the feel of an old European city and complete with a grand central church, plaza, shops and restaurants. The entire project eventually could cover some 4,500 acres.

Currently, Ave Maria University is in its second academic year at its temporary campus in North Naples, next to the Vineyards Park. Student enrollment tripled, as did the number of faculty: there are an estimated 340 students and 51 faculty members now.

The university has quickly outgrown its space and recently added 40,000 square feet of building space, including a new main library, additional classrooms and bookstore.

It's a peaceful setting, surprisingly self-sufficient, a microcosm of a permanent, larger university. Students go between buildings for classes, stop by their on-campus dormitories in between, take advantage of the on-site pool and weight room or worship in the school's chapel, all within a quarter mile radius. Commenting on how impressively this college community has sprung up in no time, Monaghan smiles, "You ain't seen nothing yet."



Clearly, he believes in this project, in his and its ability to succeed. Believing in the final accomplishment of his goals is important, but he says his faith in God is what carries him through. That faith has been a constant in Monaghan's life and gotten him through the tough times, which he says were many.

His father died on Christmas Eve when Monaghan was just four years old, a time he calls the toughest of his life. His mother, left to support two growing boys, found the task overwhelming and placed her sons in foster care while she returned to nursing school, promising to take them back after she secured a good job and could give her family a future.

After being placed in several foster homes, the Monaghan brothers were sent to the St. Joseph's Home for Boys, a Catholic orphanage run by nuns. "I soon discovered there were two prisons in Jackson Michigan: the Michigan State Penitentiary and the one I was put in."

Life in the orphanage was tough; Monaghan remembers, "I never got over the feeling my existence was abnormal, that my lot in life was unjust. I didn't brood about it, and except for the first day, I didn't rebel." His optimism and drive to move on stemmed from an unwavering faith, a thread of continuity throughout his life that ultimately guided his career.

But first, he had to make it through adolescence. He joined the Marines, a time of great character building for him: "The Corps appears to be powering over individuals when in fact it is empowering them, teaching them self-motivation."

After his stint in the service, he returned to Michigan, planning to attend college. Unable to pay for an education, he bought a single pizza place in Ypsilanti, near the Eastern Michigan University (he was attending the school at the University of Michigan until his finances ran out.) The plan was to buy the pizza shop with his brother, work at night and go to college during the day.

But his brother backed out, and Monaghan was left working 100-hour weeks and losing money. "I used to say I was the fastest pizza maker in the world," he laughs. One Sunday night, the busiest of the week because the dorms didn't sell food, most of his employees didn't show up. What could have been a disaster was a cloud with a silver lining. "Back then, we sold five sizes of pizza: six to 16 inches. Most of our business was the six-inch. It took just as long to make as the big one and just as much time to deliver but cost less. Someone said, 'Why don't you just cut out the six-inch pizzas?' I decided we would try that, and if we got behind, we'd pull the phones. That was our plan.



Monaghan in the early days, making pizza.



Monaghan in high school.



Early delivery car.



Monaghan in the Detroit Tiger's dugout.

"We never got too busy and yet we made 50 percent more money that night than we ever had. Suddenly, I was making money. The next night we cut out the nine-inch pizza and before I knew it, the bills got caught up."

But Monaghan made a move he later regretted. "I now had something that was of value, so I wanted to protect it, make it grow." He took on a 50/50 partner, someone he viewed as talented and business minded. The partner would manage the store while Monaghan focused on opening a second store in Mount Pleasant.

While the second store thrived, the first one faltered. It turned out the partner Monaghan had trusted was running the business into the ground.

Finally, after three years, in 1965, the partners split. Monaghan says this was just one of several bad business partnerships he entered into but chalks it up as a lesson learned.

"I've been burned. I've been burned bad," he says. "I could write a book about trusting people too much. I was always a sucker for talent, because I thought it was something I didn't have and I ended up overlooking character. But I learned a lot. I found out I could do OK by myself. It built my confidence. I never had any inferiority complex about not finishing college."

In spite of the bad business memories, life didn't turn out half bad for Monaghan in Mount Pleasant. One night he took over deliveries and let his employee handle the store. The first stop he made was to one of the women's dormitories. To deliver the pizza, he had to go through the receptionist and switchboard operator. "This girl that was at the switchboard nearly knocked my eyes out."

He asked her on a date, then a second, at which time Monaghan gave Margie a heart-shaped pizza. On their third date he proposed. That was 42 years ago. (Today the couple has four daughters and eight grandchildren, all of whom live within 35 miles of each other in Michigan.)

With his personal life flourishing, so did business. What started as a single store in a small college town in Michigan became the largest pizza delivery company in the world. Domino's had 6,100 franchised and company-owned stores in 64 countries, with revenues of one billion dollars.

He enjoyed the windfall, living a life he had only dreamed of: buying a baseball team and a race car that won the Indy 500,

a classic car collection, a home designed by Frank Lloyd Wright.

Then, he decided to cash out, selling Domino's Pizza to re dedicate his life to religious work. His Catholic education projects so far include four Spiritus Sanctus Catholic elementary schools, including two in Honduras, Ave Maria College in Ypsilanti, Michigan and a Catholic law school in Ann Arbor, Michigan. He has been on the boards of five Catholic colleges.

With the new university, he says, "I have a personal interest in training people to be administrators in Catholic schools. When you have a good principal, you have a good school."

A liberal arts university, Ave Maria offers a variety of bachelor degrees, from teaching to music and masters and PhDs in theology. A pre-theology program includes men who have already applied to a diocese and others who are considering the priesthood as one of several options. A program for women is in the works.

Recruiting students doesn't seem to be a problem and Monaghan knows why: "The professors, academic standards, the Catholic identity, the spiritual aspect of course — and the chance to go to college in paradise."

His business experience has taught him to run the University like a business, while focusing on providing quality education. To sum up his business philosophy, Monaghan says, "Aim high, play fair. People ask me what made me such a success, which is funny, because I never considered myself a success. I made so many mistakes along the way.

"But I saw some research that was done. It found successful people had, above all else, three traits that stood out. Number one is that successful people are dreamers. Well, that's me for sure. Two is enthusiasm — and that's one thing I have naturally; I just never grew up. And the third is being action oriented. I am action oriented, but that's God given. I can't take credit for that." ■

