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Entrepreneur Brian Cunningham Discusses Perseverance and Making a Difference with MBI Scholars

Author, entrepreneur, devoted family man, and Macklin Business Institute Advisory Board member Brian Cunningham has experienced a lifetime's worth of triumphs and pitfalls. Recently, the one-time protégé of the late Gordon Macklin stopped by Montgomery College to deliver a presentation to the Macklin Scholars.

Cunningham, who founded his first company in 1969, began his lecture by citing a famous 1941 commencement speech in which British politician, Winston Churchill, told a group of graduates to "Never give in. Never give in. Never, never, never..."

Cunningham titled his 2008 book "Never Give Up: Life Lessons of a Successful Entrepreneur" and has refused to let an up-and-down economy, a failed venture, or a less-than-stellar report card derail him.

"I remember a time [as a child] when I came home with three Fs, a B and a C," said Cunningham, who admits school wasn't always a priority. "Back then it wasn't too hard to get a pen and change an F. That particular report card turned out to be four Bs."

At the University of Maryland,

Cunningham was asked to leave just 43 days into his freshman year. He says his awakening came at U.S. Navy boot camp and submarine school where he learned failure was never an option. Eventually, he earned his physics degree from St. Francis University. After serving on a submarine, he went to the Naval Ordnance Laboratory as a physicist before moving on to NASA-Goddard where he worked in the U.S. space program. At the time, the space program was dedicated to sending a man to the moon.

In 1969, Cunningham embarked on what would become a life of venture capitalism. In the basement of a salon, and two Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute graduates as his partners, Cunningham founded Computer Entry Systems Corporation (CES). After a difficult beginning that saw four straight years of losses, perseverance paid off. CES eventually employed over 1,000 people and became a publicly traded company. CES delivered an average of 34 times their investment to founding shareholders.

"This is an example of why people can't give up... and to keep pushing until you get your breakthrough," MBI sophomore

Dearborn Allen said. "Most people would have given up after the first or second year without ever reaping the benefits. If most business owners had [Mr. Cunningham's] attitude toward their business, it would drastically reduce the number of failed businesses in this country."

He retired as chairman and CEO of CES in 1989 when it was sold to another public company for over \$40 million.

With the current economic crisis gripping the nation, Cunningham shared a favorite acronym that now, more than ever, can help the Scholars as well as future entrepreneurs. "CAPP," which stands for commitment, attitude, planning and persistence, made an impression on the Scholars.

Freshman Aquilah Nixon is confident that "CAPP" can help her overcome the academic challenges and time-consuming projects that the Scholars will encounter over the next few months.

"We must be committed to our [project] responsibilities and duties," Nixon said. "Keep a positive attitude and frame of mind when working on these projects; Stick to the plan and schedule because getting off track on a couple of projects can put us behind; Finally, persistence is the key to striving for success and achievement."

After enduring his own losses resulting from the economic meltdown, Cunningham and two partners are tackling an entirely



Brian Cunningham is a Macklin Business Institute Advisory Board member.

new project. Having received an honorary doctorate from his alma-mater for his humanitarian efforts on behalf of victims of poverty, Cunningham's latest venture combines both his humanitarian ideals with his cutting-edge business sense.

The project, Ocean Energy Systems, plans to market the company's Amplified Wave Energy Converter in the United States, its territories and in Africa. It entails capturing a formerly untapped ocean energy resource to cost-effectively desalinate and purify ocean water.

"I think Mr. Cunningham is a man who sees an opportunity to make the world a better place and jumps at it without hesitation," Dearborne Allen said. "When I start a business, I want to be ethically conscious and I also want to seek the betterment of the people in the world."