Donovan: a man with a goal

By Wendy Poles

"Some see things as they are and ask why; we must ask, why not?" was the slightly modified version of Robert Kennedy's words in the theme of Professor John J. Donovan, a man who has faith in the power of one man to make a difference in the world.

Ever since Donovan realized his inherent desire to become someone who really mattered, he has directed his life toward leaving his mark by helping as many people as he possibly can in his lifetime. And setting up others to pick up where he leaves off. One of those is his wife, who believes enough in his goals not to mind the fact that he spends more time in his Tech Square office than in his home. She helps to raise their five children, who will join him in his work.

Quoting Robert Frost, he describes himself after a 16-hour day at work: "And miles to go before I sleep." He can spare little time for sleeping, often on a cot in his office.

His goal of making a difference has already been partially fulfilled through 6.251. "I hope to give students the tools and awareness of their responsibilities. To make a person aware without tools to do something is to frustrate him. I believe computers are a technology which can greatly help mankind."

Other examples of the partial fulfillment of his goal are some of his past projects. Boston's Lowell School, whose original purpose was to "give the community an education for the price of two bushels of wheat," was having trouble with low enrollment. Donovan attributed this to the fact that the subjects were taught for the wrong people. The "common man had evolved into the one who could not make it through high school - he was concerned with more technical matters at B.U. or Northeastern. He has no high school diploma, and knows little about learning."

Donovan's program geared to the needs of such people included a course in computer programming. The students began to notice changes in the attitude of those who had to try to learn before, but were not motivated enough they had tried to learn before, algebra was necessary. They well.

They saw, "A=B+sC," but were not motivated enough they had tried to learn before, computer and explained how it worked and what it could do. After lecturing for a few minutes every student in the room was in the front trying to work and what it could do. After lecturing for a few minutes every student in the room was in the front trying to work.

The principal allowed him to present his ideas at the town's problems, and would have said, "You can't go trying to give a summer course. The students were getting paid by the Rotary Club, so research on mosquito control. Two other students, along with Donovan, put together a booklet entitled: "There's No Excuse: Financial Aid for Higher Education." It was put together a booklet entitled: "There's No Excuse: Financial Aid for Higher Education." It contained guidance in choosing goals and how to best attain them, means of financing an education, and a list of sources of more specific information on financial aid.

Donovan may mope, when one says to him, "That can't be done," "Well, anything is possible. Now, about that other thing I had mentioned..." A junior high school in New York City's Bedford-Stuyvesant section was plagued with a typical problem: attendance rates for many students were as low as 30%, the school's attendance rates, and F's, and many had criminal records. Nobody believed him when he announced that he was going to give a summer course for these students, and that they would attend almost every day.

The principal allowed him one meeting with these problem students. He stood at the front of the auditorium with a PDP-8 computer and explained how it worked and what it could do. After lecturing for a few minutes, he wrote some instructions on the blackboard, and announced that anyone who wanted to could use the computer. He then watched for a few minutes every student in the room was in the front trying to get a turn to use the computer. He returned the next day, and said he would offer a summer course in how to use the computer. The students who had signed up. Attendance hit an all-time high of 90%. The use of the computer soon taught the kids how to express themselves, and resulted in math and English grades going from D's and F's to A's and B's. Their sudden increase in motivation was shown to Donovan by the calls he would get at 1 am, from students who were having trouble with a particular problem. As intermediate steps towards his final goal of changing the world through helping people, Donovan has encouraged many of his students toward medical schools, graduate schools, and executive positions.

Some questions he is very often asked are: "Why are you teaching at MIT?" and "Why are you teaching at all?"

It justifies his refusal of much more highly paid and prestigious positions at other universities, and his refusal to be president of a company, by his faith in the vast potential of MIT students. He believes that... "These students will potentially have the most power to make vast improvements in the world in ten years."

He asks what we are going to do when, "Cities are choked with transportation problems, when we feel the need for personalized education, increased communication, the end of conflicts."

"These are but a few of the challenges of a new breed... they have been given a technology far more powerful than ever before... they were tempered by war... by shocking inflation and inequalities."

He sincerely believes that MIT students will have an incredible amount of power. He states that of the ten most recent millionaires, eight were technical people, at least four of which were MIT graduates. "MIT students have the tools to make a difference."

However, he states, before we can reach these goals, they must straighten themselves out. They must decide how they will use this incredible power when (Please turn to page 9)

---

Professor John J. Donovan

Photo by Sheldon Lewis

MIT Glee Club and Wellesley College Choir Sunday, Oct. 29, 3:00 pm

Presenting Quadraphonic Sound in Kresge Auditorium
John Oliver, Conducting Professional Solists and Orchestra Program
Bach: Cantata 191 "Gloria" movement of his B minor mass
Carissiemi: Jephtah Oratorio
Praetorius: Magnificat
Bach: Cantata 191 "Gloria" movement of his B Minor Mass

Tickets can be picked up FREE (while they last) Building 10 Lobby before concert.

DAMNED

LOW RATES

"Why go any other way?"
We're making the trains worth traveling again.

Amtrak

Call your Amtrak Travel Agent.