

2001

The Lubbers Legacy: A Salute to Arend D. Lubbers, President of Grand Valley State University 1969-2001

Grand Valley State University

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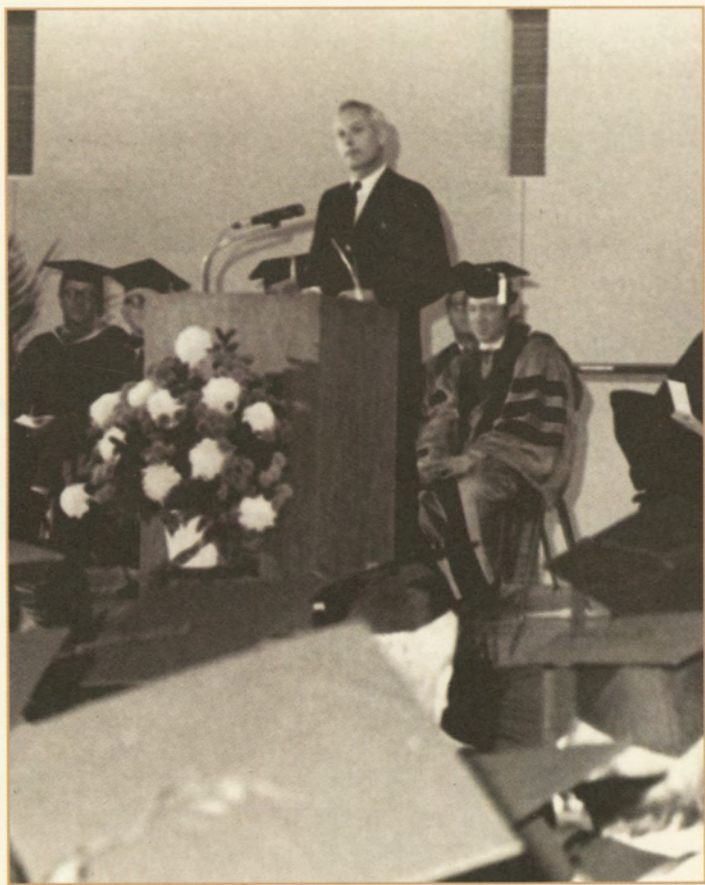
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THE LUBBERS LEGACY



THE LUBBERS LEGACY

A Salute to Arend D. Lubbers, President of Grand Valley State University, 1969-2001



Arend D. Lubbers succeeded James Zumberge as president of Grand Valley State College in 1969.

Arend D. Lubbers

Doctor of Humane Letters

Citation read by Provost Glenn Niemeyer

April 17, 2001

President Lubbers, you recently stated, "Leadership is an elusive quality. It can take so many forms, be displayed so many ways. Yet, we can always identify the leaders around us. They shine brightly like polished, multifaceted jewels."

In January of 1969 when you became President, Grand Valley State College had 2,138 students, 113 faculty, and eight academic buildings located solely on the Allendale Campus. Today, Grand Valley State University has 18,579 students, 532 faculty, extensive campuses in Allendale and Grand Rapids, as well as locations in Holland, Muskegon, and Traverse City. In the 32 years you have been President, GVSU has become the preeminent undergraduate university in West Michigan.

When you came to GVSU, you were one of the youngest university presidents in the nation. You took on the extraordinary challenge of leading a fledgling institution. We salute the trustees who selected you for recognizing your potential as a leader. Over and over again, you have justified their confidence in you and the confidence of all members of the university in your leadership. You have expanded the size and scope of this university while making sure it remained, and remains, true to its mission of providing quality undergraduate liberal education and selected professional programs.

Your leadership at GVSU has been more than the creation of bricks and mortar, although you are outstanding at this. One of the distinguishing qualities of your leadership has been your approachability, warmth, and willingness to listen and discuss. What other university president regularly wanders the campus asking, "How are things?" with such warmth and sincere interest? What other university president, when no one is watching, stops and picks up trash as he walks from building to building? More than anything else, you are known for asking, "What can I do to help?"

For your outstanding role in leading this university and for the personal traits that define your leadership, and in celebration of your 32-year career at Grand Valley State University, on the recommendation of the faculty, we honor you today by awarding you the university's highest honor. In doing so, we also wish to recognize and honor Nancy Lubbers for her contributions to the university.

By the authority vested in me by the Board of Trustees, and with great respect and affection, I proudly confer upon you the degree of Doctor of Humane Letters, *Honoris Causa*, with all its rights and privileges.



THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

April 30, 2001

Arend D. Lubbers
President
Grand Valley State University
1 Campus Drive
Allendale, MI 49401

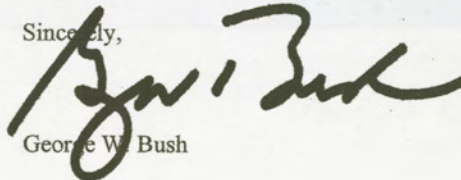
Dear Don:

I am pleased to congratulate you on your retirement from Grand Valley State University. During your 32-year tenure as President, Grand Valley has developed into one of Michigan's finest universities. Under your leadership, by demanding excellence, Grand Valley State University has seen many fine accomplishments and high enrollment growth.

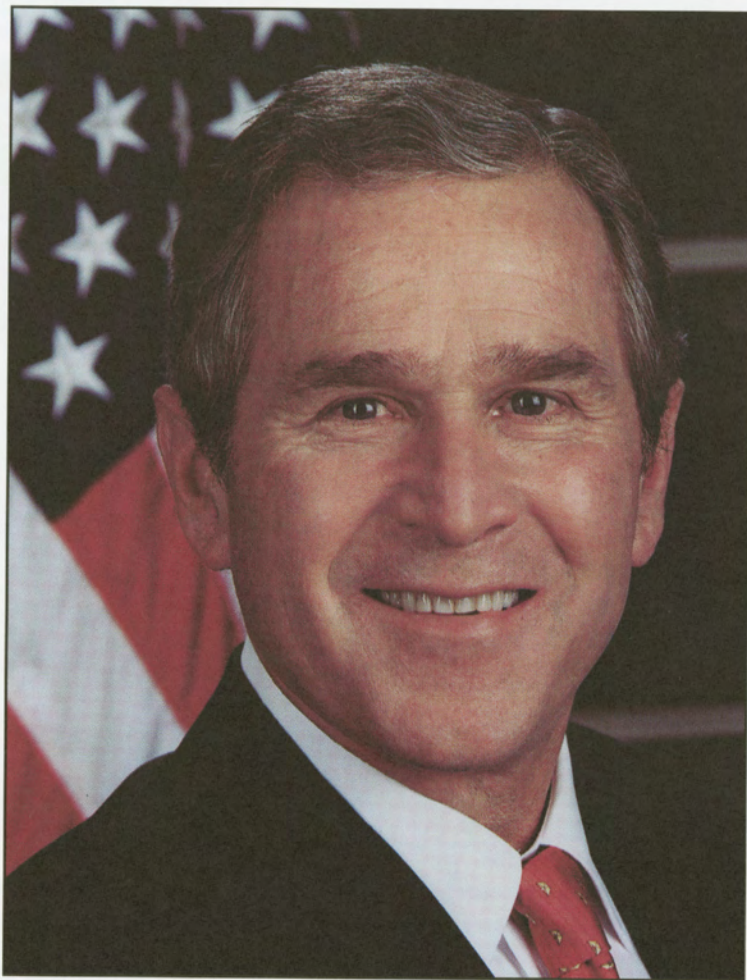
Education is one of our nation's top priorities. Caring and committed educators make all the difference in the lives of our youth. I commend you for your dedication and hard work, which have benefited so many students. By helping provide a strong learning environment, you have enabled college students to achieve their dreams and live rich, full lives.

Again, congratulations to you and your wife Nancy. Laura joins me in sending best wishes for a rewarding and enjoyable retirement.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "George W. Bush", written in a cursive style.

George W. Bush



Arend D. Lubbers



The Lubbers Legacy begins with the mission passed from father to son. Arend D. Lubbers grew up on college campuses. His father, Irwin J. Lubbers, was president of Hope College from 1945 to 1963, and before that served as president or professor at other colleges. So it's not surprising that Don Lubbers made the world of academia the setting for his life's work. What is striking, however, are the passion and vision that have characterized his tenure at Grand Valley State University.





Lubbers became the second president of Grand Valley State College, as it was then known, in 1969 – six years after the first 226 students had entered its doors. Outgoing president James Zumberge had led the college to accreditation by the North Central Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools in 1968. Although he didn't know it at the time, it would be Lubbers' challenge to guide the young college all the way into the next millennium.

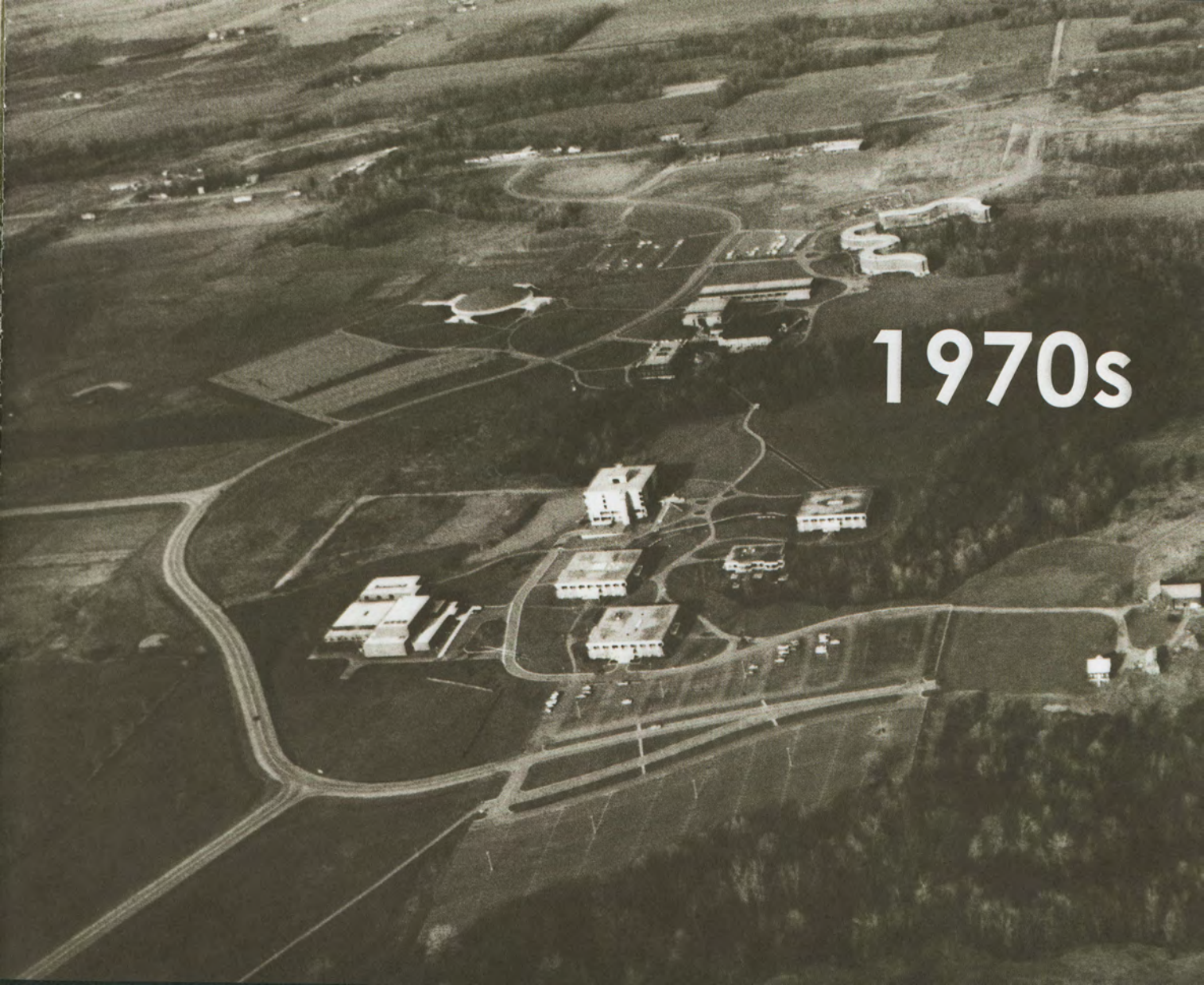
Before coming to Grand Valley, Lubbers had already distinguished himself as the youngest college president in the nation when he took on the position at Central College in Pella, Iowa, at the age of 29. Two years later, the progressive young president attracted national attention when *Life* magazine included him in its 1962 "Red-Hot Hundred" feature on the nation's 100 outstanding young leaders.

Today, Lubbers distinguishes himself again. Retiring in 2001 after standing at Grand Valley's helm for 32 years, he is the nation's longest-serving current president of a four-year state university.

“Perhaps the question to be asked is not ‘What is a university?’ but ‘Why is a university?’ A university exists to meet the needs, demands and desires of a large constituency. It exists because it is flexible, forward-looking and, yes, visionary. It exists to provide resources not otherwise available to the private and public sectors of society.

“It exists not merely to instruct its students in how to make a living, but in how to live fuller, richer lives; how to enrich their communities and those about them through their talents, knowledge and vision.” – Arend D. Lubbers



An aerial photograph of a university campus in the 1970s. The image shows several large, multi-story academic buildings arranged in a cluster. A prominent road with multiple lanes curves through the campus, connecting different areas. There are several parking lots and smaller structures scattered throughout. The surrounding landscape is a mix of open fields, wooded areas, and some residential buildings in the distance. The overall scene depicts a well-developed campus with a clear layout.

1970s





Grand Valley's first president, James Zumberge, wrote in his final report in 1969, "I have had the unusual experience of seeing a cornfield transformed into a vigorous young college." The college's second president, however, could still see mostly a field of dreams before him as he assumed office, for Grand Valley's journey from the "college in the cornfield" to a thriving state university had only just begun.



In Lubbers' first year as president, the Allendale Campus was comprised of eight buildings, 113 faculty members, 17 undergraduate degree programs, and a student enrollment of less than 2,500.



Three decades later, Grand Valley boasts additional campuses in Grand Rapids and Holland, regional centers in Muskegon and Traverse City, more than 500 faculty members, 75 undergraduate and 12 graduate programs, and a student body that has grown to nearly 20,000 students.

When Don Lubbers arrived at his new office in Lake Michigan Hall on January 18, 1969, he found the campus atmosphere anything but pastoral. The student newspaper, *The Lanthorn*, had been shut down, its editor arrested for publishing a certain four-letter word. The case mushroomed into a free speech showdown as the college Board of Control, backed by Lubbers, filed a civil suit against Ottawa County's sheriff and prosecuting attorney.

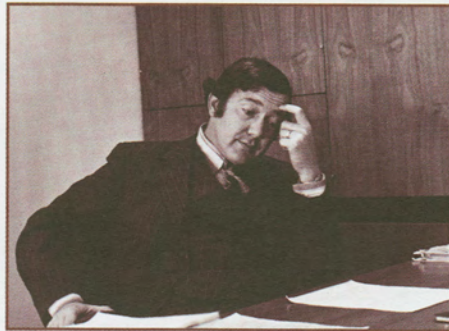




The issue ended quietly with the Board assuring county officials that the paper would refrain from profanity, but a silver lining emerged when an ensuing *Grand Rapids Press* editorial praised Lubbers as a “unifier seeking to quell the forces, which divide a college within and alienate it from its surrounding community.”







Looking back, the words seem prophetic: throughout his three decades as Grand Valley's leader, Lubbers has become known as a peacemaker who emphasizes the university's connection to the surrounding community, and, in more recent years, to global issues.



If many baby boomers recall the 1970s as a time of long hair and bellbottoms, the decade at Grand Valley could be characterized as “the great experiment.”



People who have been associated with Grand Valley for a number of years don't have to ask what that means. But for the rest, the early '70s saw Grand Valley reorganized into five colleges, each with its own identity. To make the "cluster college" concept official, an "s" was attached to the end of Grand Valley's name, and the great experiment – Grand Valley State Colleges – was begun.



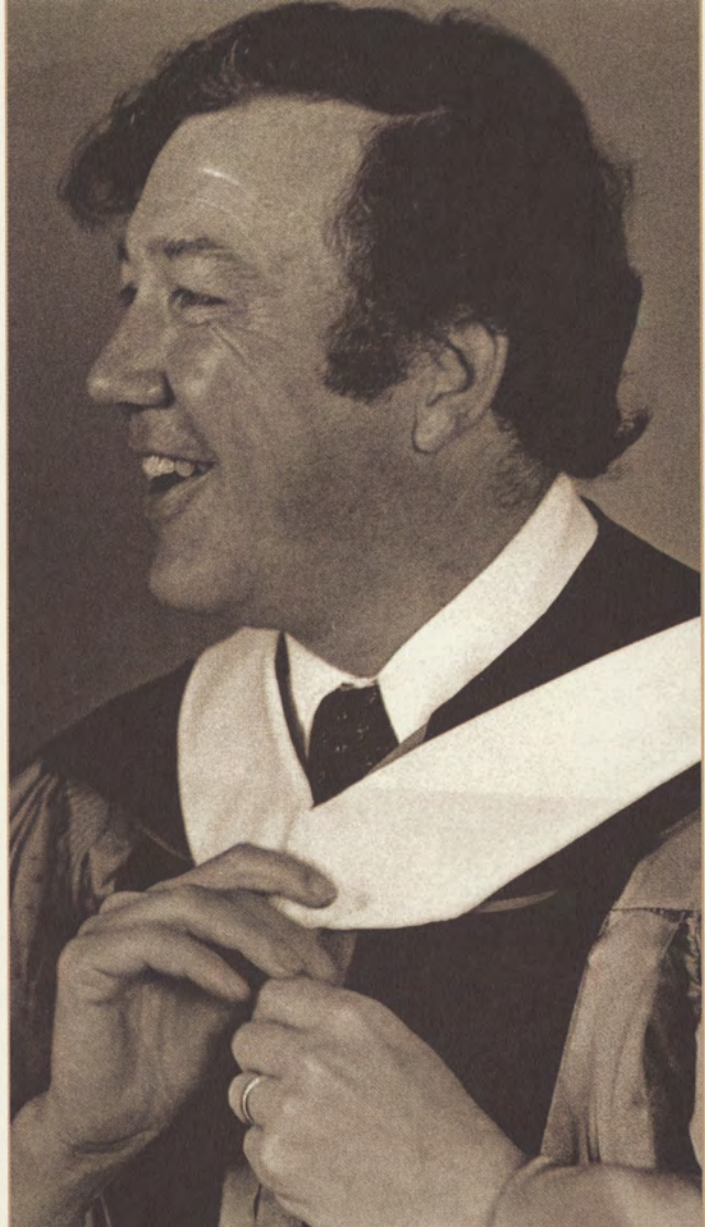
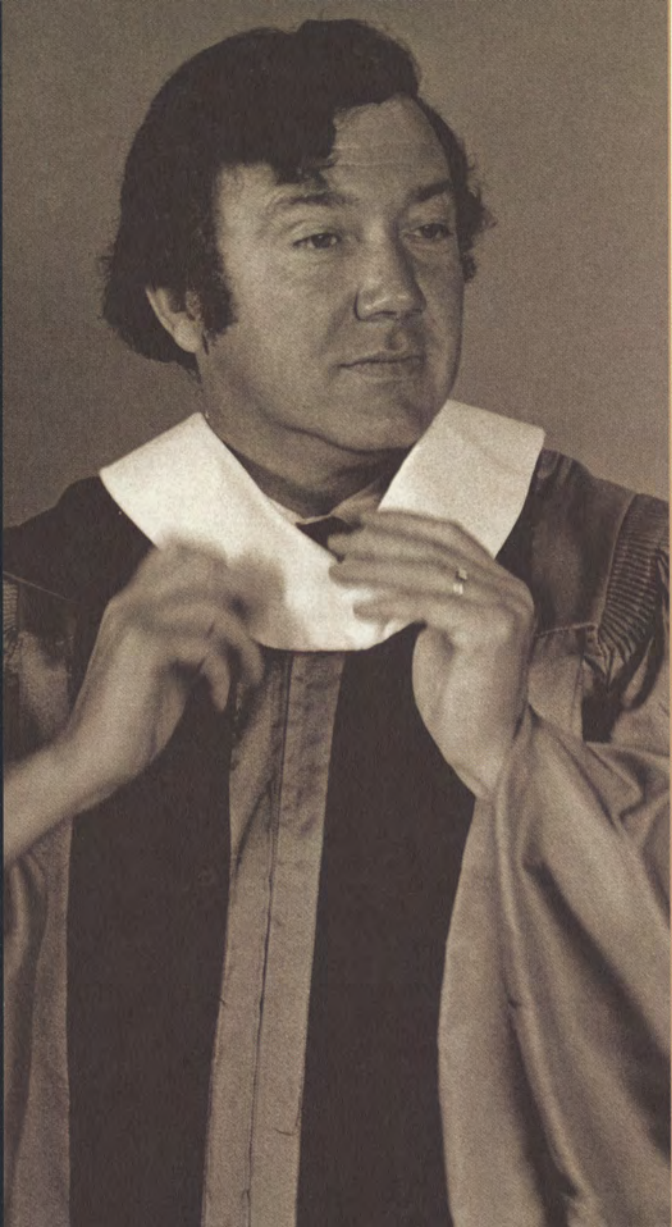
“As ‘colleges,’ we enter a new era of multiplicity of interactions, not only among our students, faculty, and our colleges, but, equally important, among members and organizations of the community,” Lubbers announced in 1972 when Gov. William Milliken approved the new name.



The decentralization into five separate colleges was seen as a way to respond to students' rebellion against "standardized, mass production courses" by offering them alternatives. The times, they were a-changin'.

"The old social and educational order is being attacked by some and, in turn, is being defended by others," said Lubbers, "and the forces meet on the college campus. Institutions of higher learning have become battlefields."





Grand Valley's new system maintained its liberal arts core but incorporated nontraditional approaches into its curricula. The five colleges were:

The College of Arts and Sciences, a traditional liberal arts college with three divisions: humanities, social studies, and science and mathematics.

Thomas Jefferson College, or TJC, 1969-1980, encouraged individual, self-motivated study in nontraditional courses. It was the most controversial of the cluster colleges although, in fact, more than one-third of its annual graduating class continued on to graduate school.

William James College, opened in 1971, promoted theoretical learning with career-oriented, practical applications.

College IV, opened in 1973 and later named Kirkhof College, began with self-paced learning modules and evolved into a college of liberal and professional studies. It was established to provide continuing education for adults and Vietnam veterans returning to college, but appealed to younger students as well.

Seidman College of Business, opened in 1973, offered the first graduate degree program – the Master of Business Administration – in response to regional business' and industry's need for advanced employee development.



William James College



Lubbers continued to support the cluster college system, even when some of the nontraditional approaches came under attack. "I believe that in our educational system, we have to be careful to provide several tracks," he said.





Nevertheless, due to changing societal attitudes, declining enrollments and major reductions in state appropriations, the great experiment was destined to end. In 1982, the remaining colleges (TJC had already been closed) were consolidated and the college reverted to its singular name. Grand Valley State College was not to change its name again until 1987 – and then it would be an event to celebrate.



Throughout the '70s, other academic programs were added to meet the needs of West Michigan communities – schools of public service, health sciences, and nursing – and institutes established for education and research. Grand Valley began to meet the need for off-campus courses by introducing classes in Grand Rapids and, subsequently, in communities along Lake Michigan. The college also brought public television to those communities when WGVC – later WGVC – hit the airwaves in 1973.





The college was growing in breadth and reach - and its president continued to adapt to the changes blowing across the ravines. Lubbers' next consideration - to establish more graduate programs, based on the success of the Seidman Master of Business program - was initially unpopular with faculty. They voted it down on the premise that the college's mission was undergraduate liberal arts programs.



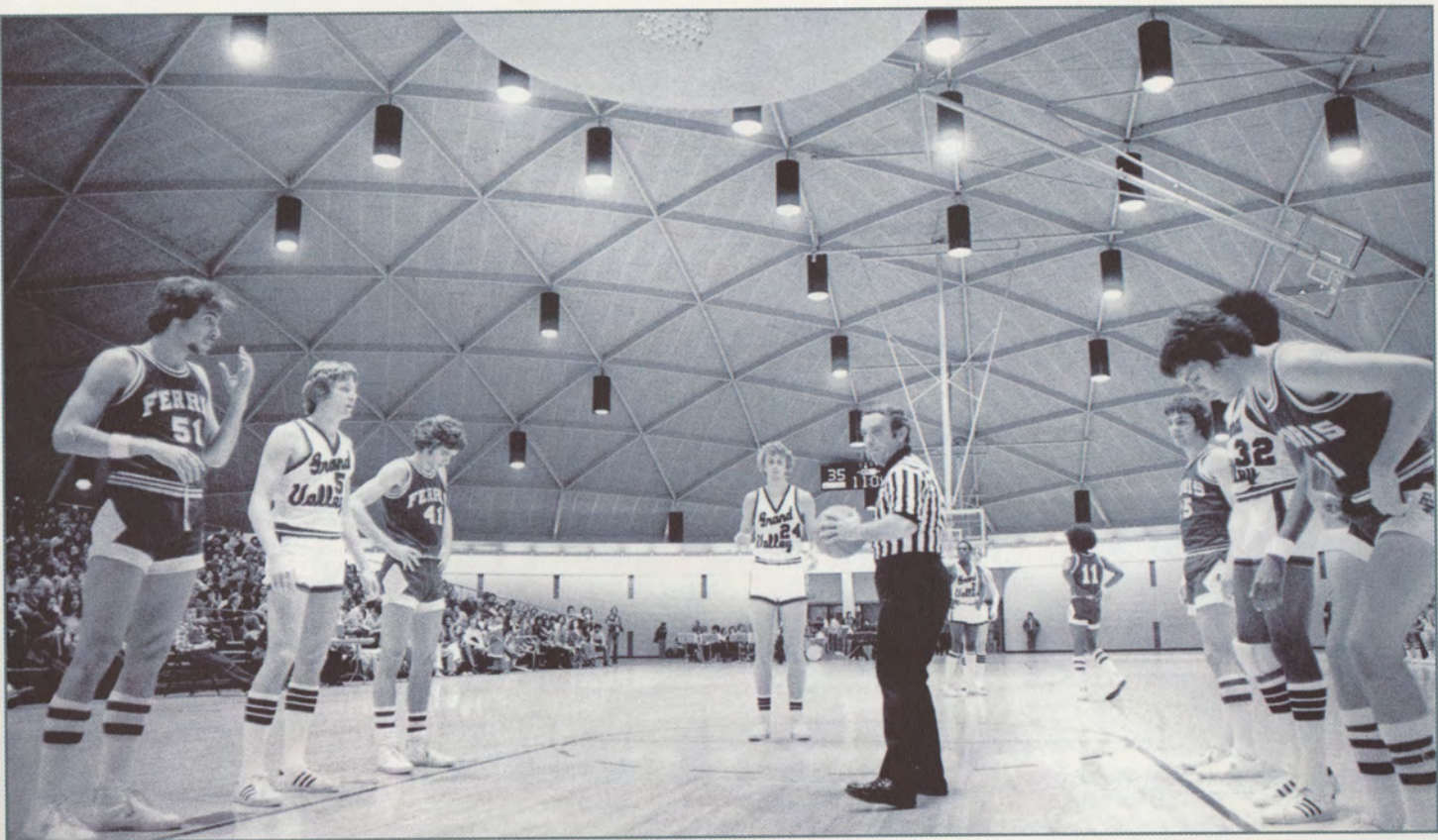
Lubbers, for the first time, rejected the faculty's recommendation and pressed ahead, telling the Board of Control that establishing graduate programs was "essential for the future of the college." Thus, the Master of Education program was initiated.













Within several years, more graduate programs were added, and faculty came to accept the important role that professional studies and graduate programs played in the college's continued success.





The '70s closed with a noteworthy addition to the campus: a football stadium. The construction of the new football field followed a disappointing end to what could be called another Grand Valley experiment – the Dome. The Fieldhouse, built in the late '60s with a domed roof, was condemned in 1978. Lubbers' support of the Lakers football team and his untiring efforts to obtain funding for a new Fieldhouse were rewarded when the Board of Control made a last-minute decision to name the new stadium and track, completed in 1979, after him.



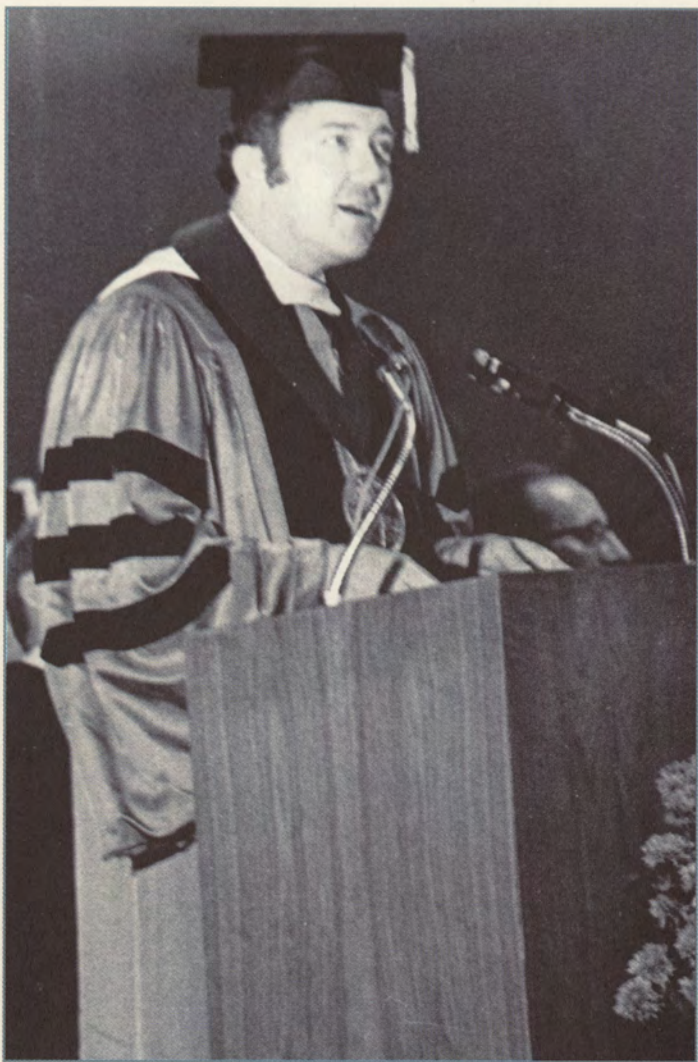
“I don’t know what to say,” Lubbers said, caught off-guard, “so I’ll say nothing. Thank you very much.”

Thus, the decade ended with a new beginning. The new Lubbers Stadium was followed the next year by groundbreaking for a new \$14.5 million athletic complex.



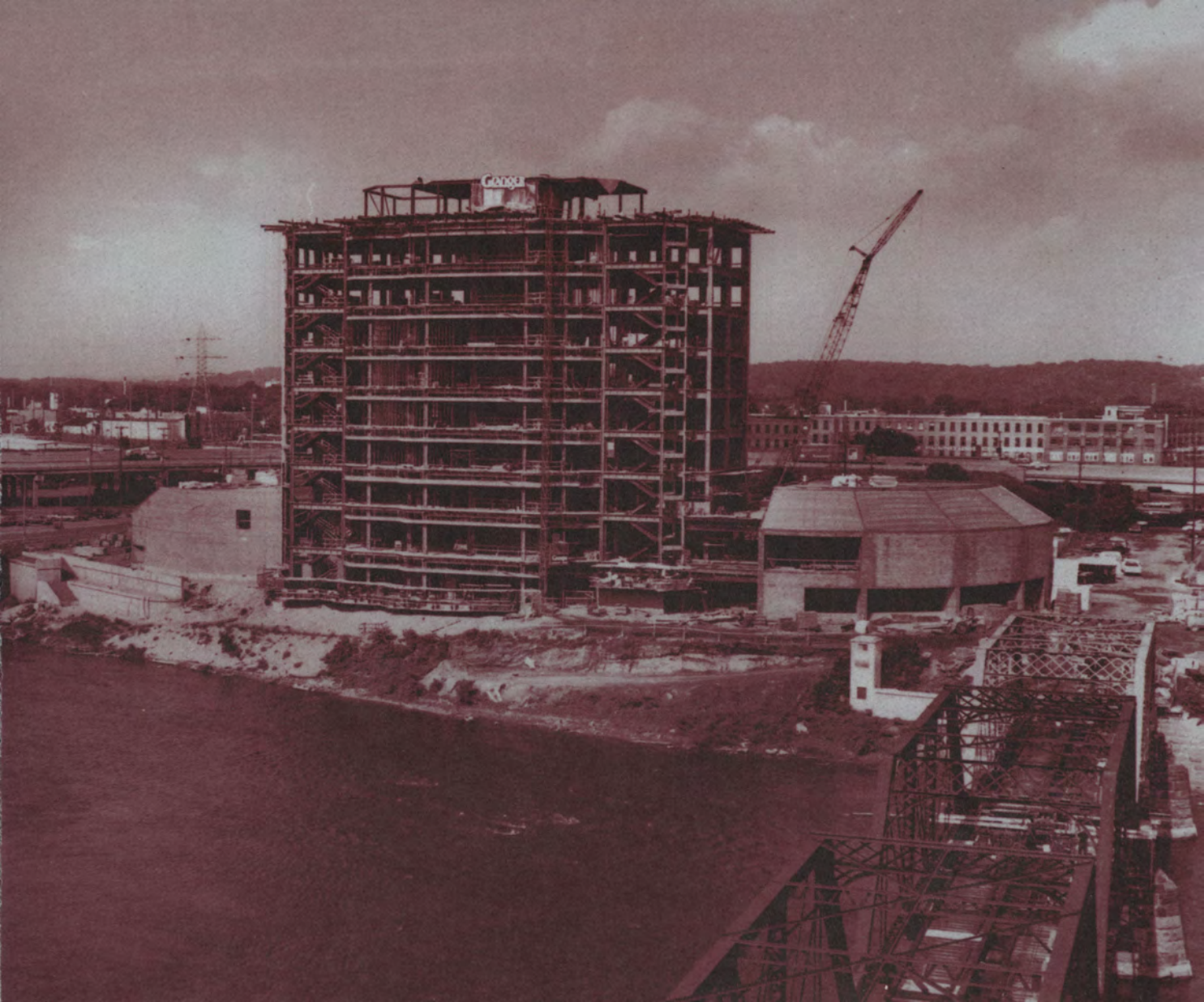












1980s





Remember Michigan in the 1980s? The jobless rate hovered above 16 percent. Car and truck production slowed to its lowest point since 1948. A popular bumper sticker gave the decade a cynical edge: "Will the last one out of Michigan please turn out the lights?"



Michigan's deep recession hit colleges and universities particularly hard. Case in point: the state's 1981 budget included a \$20 million bite out of higher education. Rumor had it that budget constraints would force Grand Valley to close its doors; it took a news conference with Gov. William Milliken on the Allendale Campus to quell that prediction.

PC *press club* *of grand rapids*

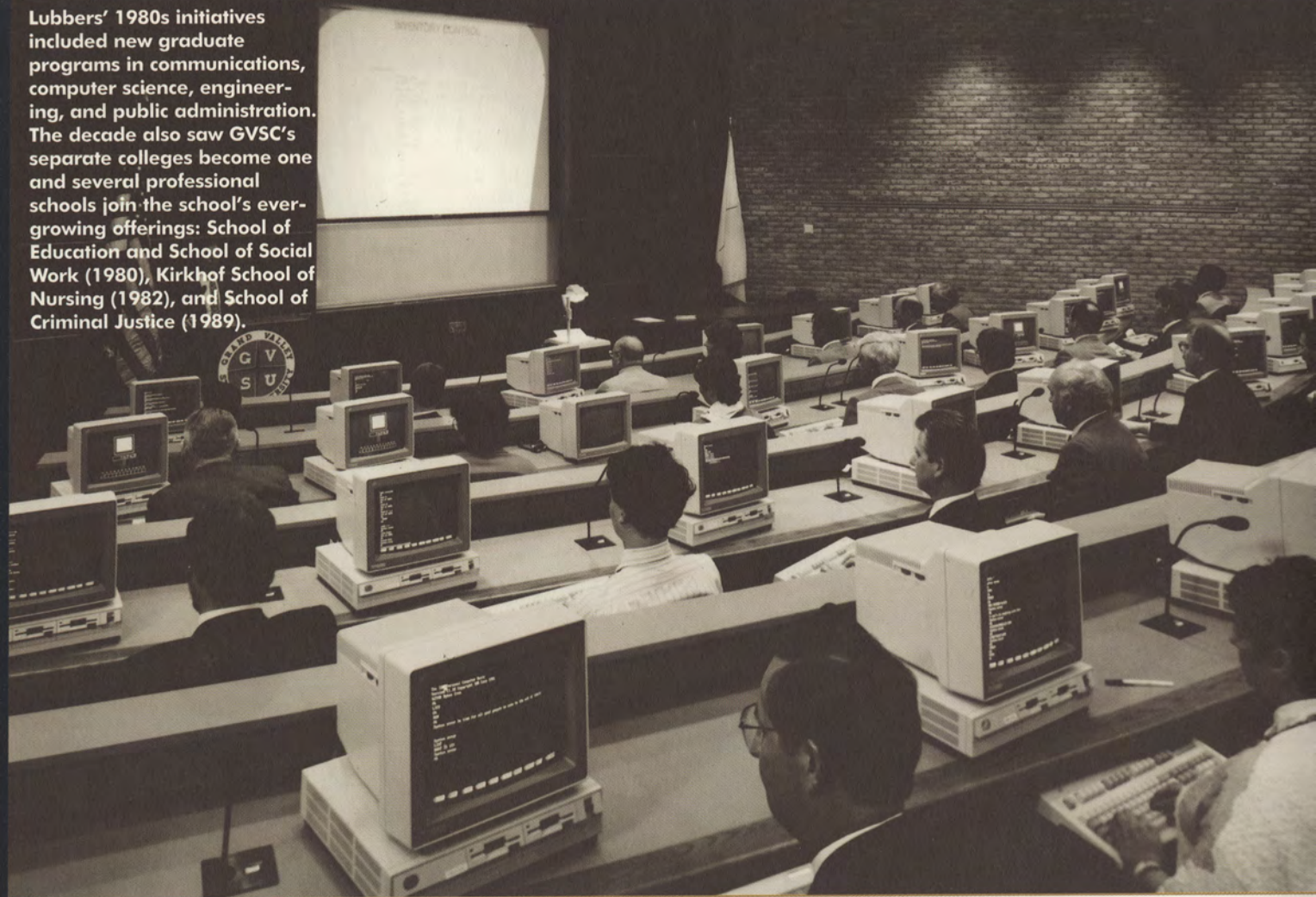


To remain viable, however, the Board of Control trimmed 5 percent from Grand Valley's budget, eliminated several positions, and shortened summer programs. During a 1982 campus address, President Lubbers said the budget provided a math lesson that contained more subtraction than addition.

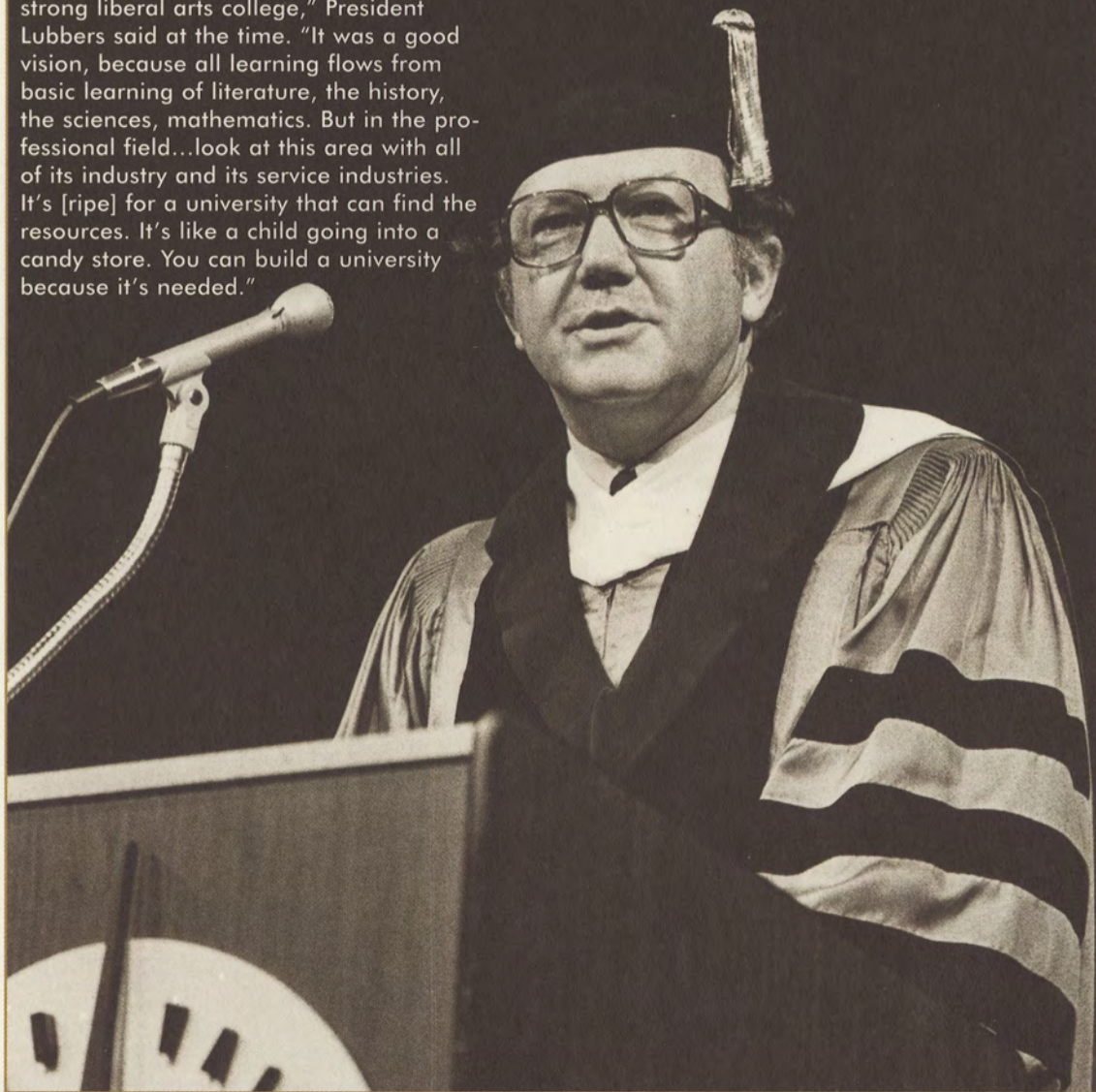


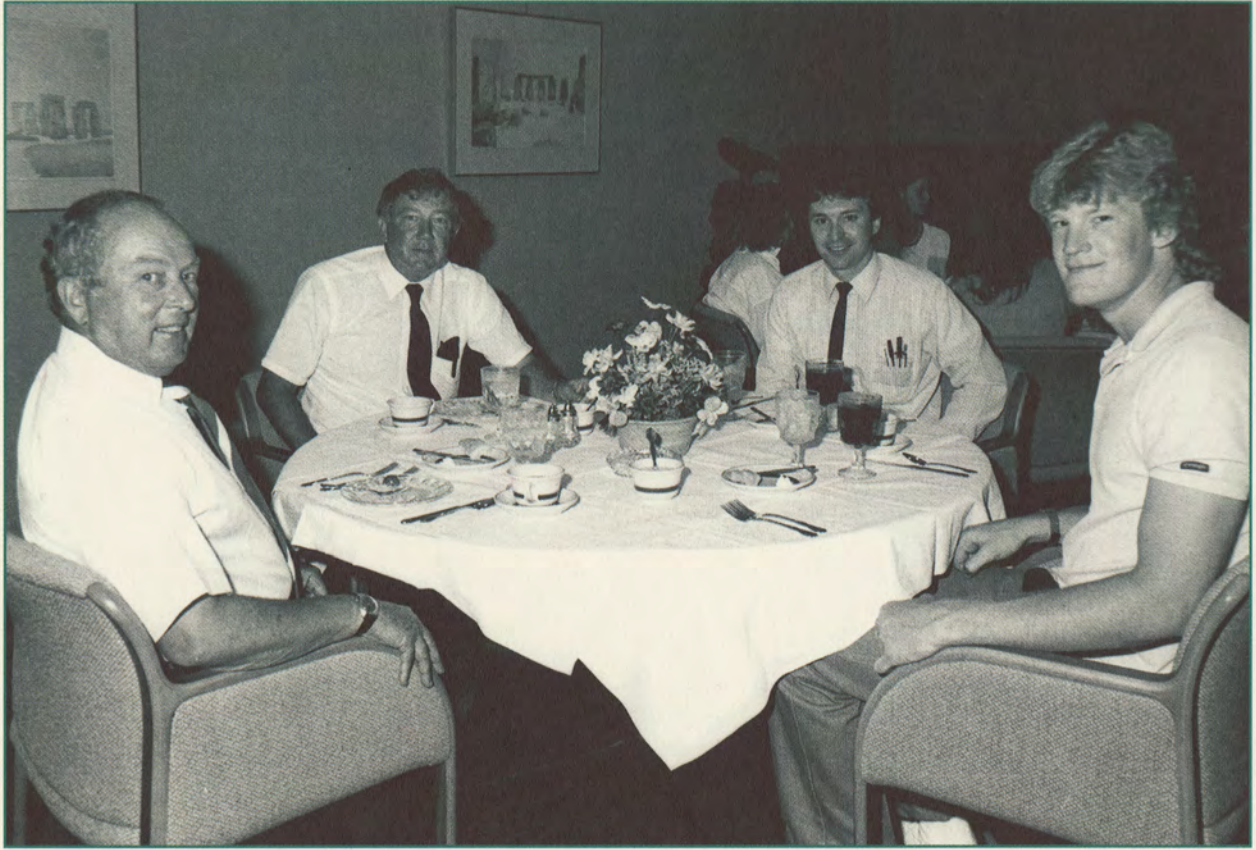
Despite heavy financial constraints, President Lubbers continued to build on his vision for Grand Valley by ensuring that new programs and facilities were added to accommodate steadily growing numbers of students. In 1984, for example, in the midst of the state's economic turndown, enrollment at Grand Valley jumped 16 percent from 6,000 to 7,000 students.

Lubbers' 1980s initiatives included new graduate programs in communications, computer science, engineering, and public administration. The decade also saw GVSC's separate colleges become one and several professional schools join the school's ever-growing offerings: School of Education and School of Social Work (1980), Kirkhof School of Nursing (1982), and School of Criminal Justice (1989).



"The college was founded, of course, as a strong liberal arts college," President Lubbers said at the time. "It was a good vision, because all learning flows from basic learning of literature, the history, the sciences, mathematics. But in the professional field...look at this area with all of its industry and its service industries. It's [ripe] for a university that can find the resources. It's like a child going into a candy store. You can build a university because it's needed."





Burgeoning enrollment also came with a need for student housing. In 1986, the Board of Control authorized a \$3 million bond to build four new residence buildings. President Lubbers had always been responsive to student needs, and the new dorms were no exception; the buildings were equipped with computer labs, exercise rooms, lounges, and outdoor decks.



The decade also saw two other major construction projects, a \$14.5 million athletic complex on the Allendale Campus and the beginnings of the Grand Rapids Campus.



When it was completed in 1982, the Fieldhouse complex included a swimming pool, a basketball arena, racquetball courts, a weight and aerobics training area, and offices. Although President Lubbers has said that building the Fieldhouse came at a time "when there wasn't much money around," he continued to lead plans to construct other buildings.





"In addition to the academic programs, fundraising, and the politics, and enjoyment of the arts, my reading and all of the things that I do, there's never been a time that I've been without buildings and facilities as part of my mental life," Lubbers reflected.





Critics of the early GVSC often said that Allendale was too remote a location to attract students. Although President Lubbers has always called the school's location "just right," he also recognized the need to expand its presence in Grand Rapids. A downtown campus, he believed, would serve graduate students and returning professionals, allowing the Allendale Campus to maintain its focus on undergraduate studies.

In 1980, the university obtained property along the Grand River, but the project stayed on the back burner for five years, until \$20.9 million in state funding was made available and \$8 million was raised through a capital campaign.





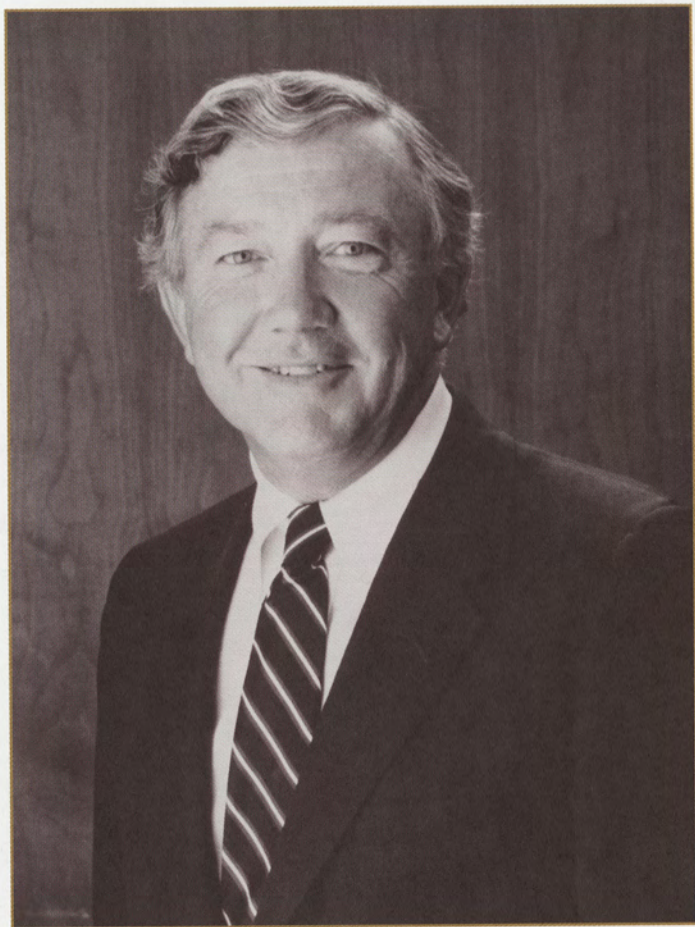
Dedicated in 1988, the 155,000-square-foot Eberhard Center now houses numerous academic programs. During the building's dedication, students and faculty members ran the 12 miles between Allendale and Grand Rapids, carrying a torch from the main campus to the Grand Rapids Campus, which is also home to the Meijer Public Broadcast Center.



Lubbers' determined leadership – and the resulting growth of enrollment, academic programs, student life, and facilities – prompted lawmakers to approve a bill granting university status to Grand Valley in 1987.

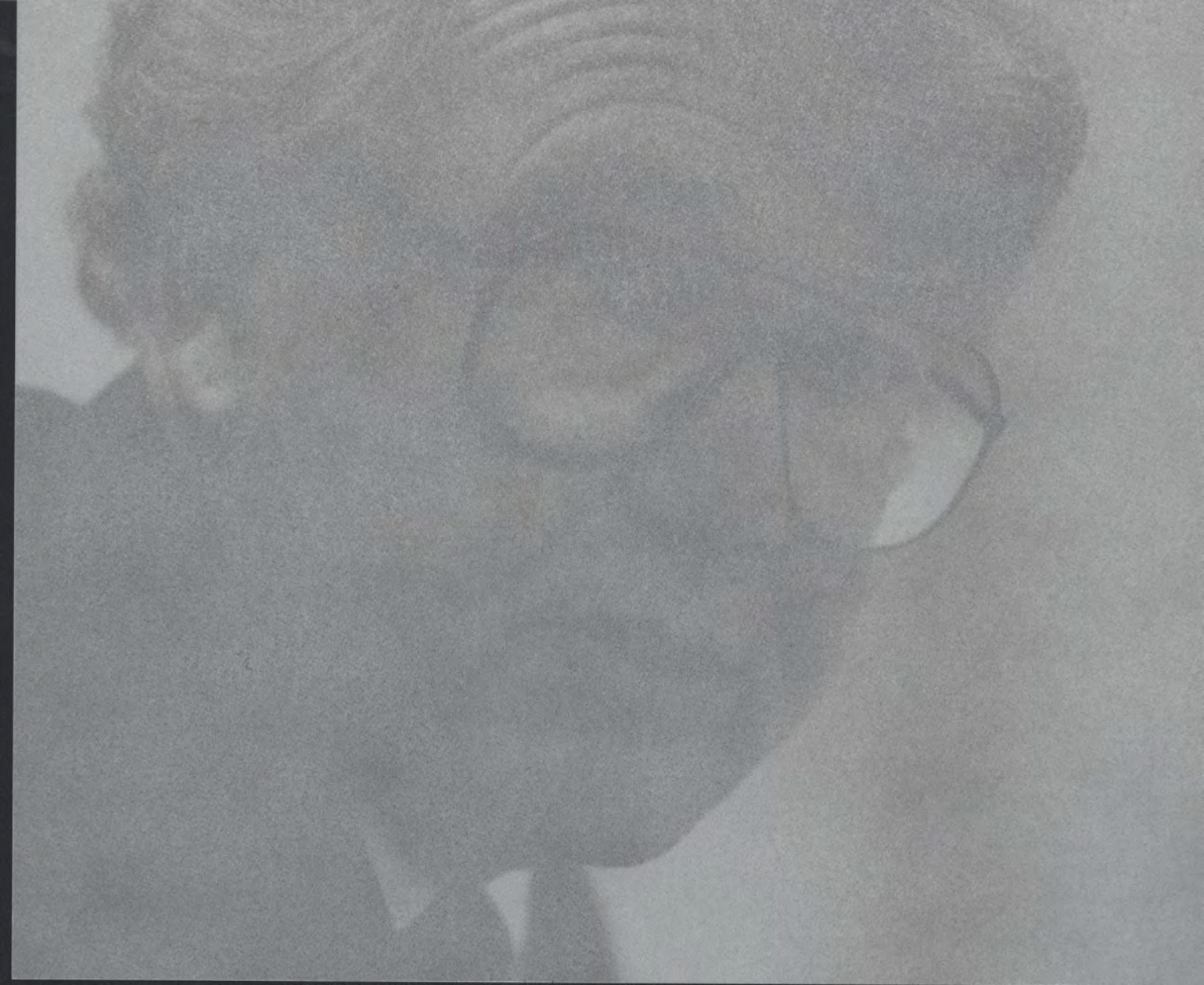






The transformation into Grand Valley State University suited Lubbers' vision for the future.






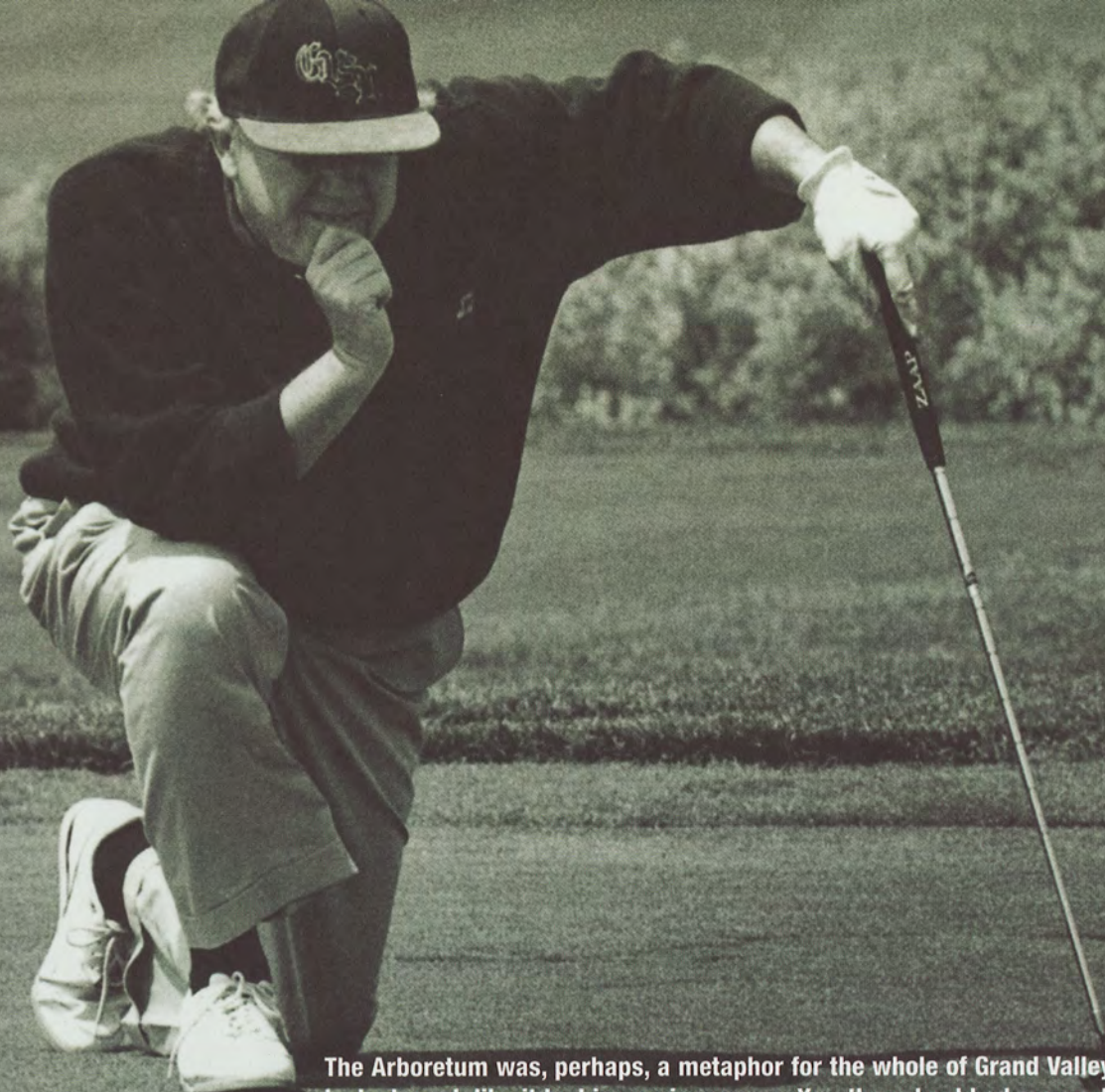


GRAND
STATE

1990s



In 1990, GVSU set out to improve its environmental efforts with a program that called for one tree to be planted for each ton of paper the university recycled. In October of that year, 33 trees were planted on two acres on the Allendale Campus – a humble beginning, but that natural space, now known as the VanSteelend Arboretum, slowly grew to encompass seven acres with an impressive 735 trees and shrubs from 125 species. By the decade's end, the results of a simple environmental awareness effort had far surpassed anyone's expectations.



The Arboretum was, perhaps, a metaphor for the whole of Grand Valley. In 1990, the campus still looked much like it had in previous years. Yes, the school had grown, but that growth had been slow and steady. Few people could have predicted the boom—both in enrollment and in facilities—that would occur over the next decade. GVSU's days as the “college in the cornfield” were soon to end.



In 1989, enrollment edged past 10,000 for the first time. By the end of the 1990s, it was pushing 20,000. To accommodate that growth, student housing was added at an average of 400 beds a year from 1995 through 2000, as the Allendale Campus took on more and more of the qualities of a residential university community.



President Lubbers knew what was happening: "I believe the pressure to grow evolves from two factors," he said. "First, we are in an area of population increase. Ottawa County is one of the fastest-growing counties in the state. It is not so unusual then, that Grand Valley is the fastest-growing university. "Second, our curriculum across the university meets the needs of our growing clientele, and we are known for emphasis on good teaching. Our location in a population center and our quality as a university make us attractive, in our region and beyond."



In fact, Grand Valley's attractiveness beyond West Michigan is a big reason for its growth. By the end of the 1990s, more than one-third of the university's undergraduates were from Southeast Michigan.

An obvious result of enrollment growth was the growth in numbers of alumni, about 44,000 to date. At homecoming 2000, those graduates were recognized when the new Alumni House and Visitor Center was dedicated. The Alumni House, Lubbers said, "sends the message that we have matured as an institution. Much of our support in the founding and formative years came from non-graduates or graduates from other colleges and universities who were interested in developing an indigenous university in this region of West Michigan.

"Grand Valley is now at a place in that development where the alumni as well as the supporting friends will be necessary to carry the university to new levels of achievement," he said.





The '90s building boom in Allendale included the Cook-DeWitt Center and The Meadows golf course, the Cook Carillon Tower, the Student Services Building, the Seymour and Esther Padnos Hall of Science, Henry Hall, a new fitness center, the Art Complex, and the Children's Center.



GVSU's physical presence grew in other parts of West Michigan as well. In 1998, the Meijer Campus in Holland opened, and in 2001 the Lake Michigan Center in Muskegon became the new home of the Annis Water Resources Institute.



Among the most remarkable achievements was the story of GVSU's impact on Grand Rapids. When GVSU opened the Richard M. DeVos Center in Grand Rapids in September 2000, the university's mark on Grand Rapids became clear for all to see. With stunning architecture, including the Beckering Family Carillon Tower, rising on the skyline of Michigan's second largest city, GVSU assumed a visual significance that matched its role as a learning institution.

The DeVos Center reflected Lubbers' understanding of the worth of aesthetically stimulating architecture and art in the education environment.





“It’s been gratifying to me to hear and watch the students at the DeVos Center,” Lubbers said. “They’ve really appreciated it [and] they’ve made it a point to articulate that appreciation. How much more money – if we take the same square footage and enclose it in the least expensive way that you possibly could – how much money would you save? Five percent? Ten percent maximum? Isn’t beauty worth that?”

“Buildings are symbolic as well as functional,” he added. “The DeVos Center makes a major statement about our commitment to downtown Grand Rapids. Its architecture and interior design set a high standard of quality, and, I believe, alert the citizens of the state that Grand Valley is a university striving to be the best.”

Also opening on the Pew Campus in 2000 were the Fred M. Keller Engineering Laboratories Building and Secchia Hall apartments – the first student housing in Grand Rapids. In May 2001, ground was broken for the Center for Health Professions on Michigan Street in Grand Rapids.



Having stood at GVSU's helm for three decades, President Lubbers stood before an emotional, overflow crowd of faculty, staff, and students in Cook-DeWitt Center in September 2000 to announce his retirement. Citing his wife's impact on his presidency, Lubbers referred to the office as a joint endeavor.

"Nancy and I have decided to retire June 30, 2001," he told the gathering. "I don't know when I will run out of steam, but I will be 70 three weeks after we leave the presidency. That's as good an age as any to admit your mortality. With the steam that is left in me I will always be ready to use it for Grand Valley."





As Lubbers closed out his remarkable tenure, having laid plans for more academic programs, Allendale Campus growth, and strengthened partnerships with Grand Rapids Community College and the City of Grand Rapids, many people began considering his legacy – an exercise the president himself seemed reluctant to engage in.



“Every life makes its imprint some way or other, for good or for bad,” he said. “The life functions and it does something or fails to do something, and whatever it is, a life is a life and it is a life that’s measured or evaluated. Most every life is evaluated by someone.

“I think I’d just leave it up to others to decide what the legacy is,” he added.



Instead of focusing on his successes, President Lubbers focused on the journey.

"I guess I like the feeling of gratitude better than I like the feeling of success. Who's to measure the success, really, and what it is? I think I've been lucky because I can't observe Grand Valley and say that Grand Valley's been unsuccessful. It's really been fairly successful in the last 30 years—now how much of that credit should I take? I have no idea. There have been a lot of people, there have been thousands of people involved in that."

In the end, it may come down to vision—undeniably something Lubbers has provided during his tenure.

"I have the job of having the vision and providing leadership. And I've been very fortunate to have a lot of my vision become reality. That's a break. So my feeling is one of gratitude," Lubbers said.



"I believe our university is called to be the best undergraduate teaching institution in the state system, [one] whose reputation will begin to spread beyond the state," he said. "I believe our university, because of its early sensitivities, will relate in better and special ways to its constituencies in teaching, research, graduate and undergraduate programs, and consultation. It will be a model of its relationships with those outside the university. I believe our university is destined to order its internal relationships and its conflicts in ways that will allow most of the people who comprise it to be positive toward their work and toward most of their colleagues. I see Grand Valley as a model for how faculty, students, administrators, and staff work together and relate to one another."





Future



Grand Valley State University has entered the 21st Century with a bright future, built on the past 32 years of the leadership of President Arend D. Lubbers.

As our community of students, alumni, faculty, staff, and friends contemplates the legacy of this remarkable man, We may see it best in some of the challenges with which he leaves us, in his own words, taken from his address to the university, April 17, 2001.





“The first generation of Grand Valley faculty and staff are leaving the stage. We have given this place, I believe, a larger dose of commitment than most new state universities. That dose has made some special things happen here, and my hope is that you will carry this place forward keeping the commitment quotient high.

“The university’s challenge is to encourage the student to make the ownership lifelong – for the alumni will do as much to determine the future of the university as those who currently staff it.

“We will always be a Michigan state university, and we should find more throughout the state who take ownership. We can be a national university. We are in the state of becoming. We are not yet what we are going to be.

“Upon his retirement from the Army after being recalled from Japan and Korea, General Douglas MacArthur was invited to address the Congress of the United States. In closing he turned to military lore for a quote. He said ‘Old soldiers never die, they just fade away.’ I think that is true for my profession as well. “Old presidents never die, they just fade away.”

LEGACY

For every time, a season, Now this season
of departures, even as summer reaches its height.

In '69 he came, with longer hair, came to lead.
Now he waves goodbye, his vision at its height.

A white-haired man now, still his eyes sparkle.
And those who shared the vision, share the love.

When he arrived as a young man, she came too –
Together, over years, their lives grew as one.

He defers all credit to providence or luck,
the way a tree might credit sun or rain or ground.

Those who know will say how a man makes
his luck--with spirit, goodness, and with words

lived up to, promises kept. That's how a tree
grows tall and proud. The other trees all gather round.

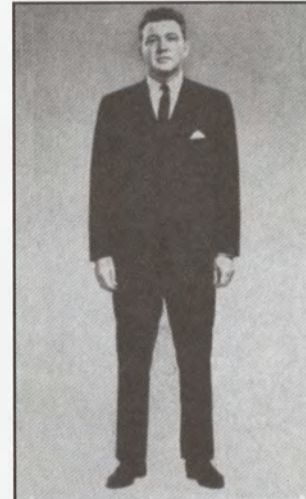
Patricia Clark
GVSU Poet-in-Residence



Doctor of Humane Letters Honorary Degree, Grand Valley State University; 2001
Doctor of Science Honorary Degree, Academy of Economics, Krakow, Poland; 1989
Doctor of Letters Honorary Degree, Hope College; 1988
Doctor of Science Honorary Degree, University of Sarajevo; 1987
Doctor of Letters Honorary Degree, Central College; 1977

Selected Highlights of the Lubbers Presidency

- Pew Faculty Teaching and Learning Center
- Office of Minority Affairs
- Academic Computing Center
- Seidman School of Business
- Office for Economic Expansion
- GVU Foundation
- Founder, the Washington Campus Program
- Padnos School of Engineering
- Kirkhof School of Nursing
- School of Health Sciences
- Physical Therapy Program
- School of Education
- Honors College
- Barbara Padnos International Center
- Annis Water Resources Institute
- Van Andel Global Trade Center
- Johnson Center for Philanthropy
- Family Owned Business Institute
- Meadows Golf Club
- West Michigan Public Broadcasting
- Childrens Center
- Recreation and Wellness Services
- Regional Math and Science Center



AREND LUBBERS, 31
Lubbers became president of Central College, Pella, Iowa, at 29. Stressing the liberal arts, he is establishing a series of mind-stretching seminars by noted scholars such as Historian Arnold Toynbee.

Life magazine, September 14, 1962.

The Lubbers Legacy

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Writers: Brian J. Bowe; Michele Johnson; Nancy Willey

Designer: Philip Mitri

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