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Inauguration Address

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Inauguration Address

Mark A. Murray is now the third president of Grand Valley State University.

Thank you, Trustee Johnson, other members of the board, President Emeritus Lubbers, other participants in today's program, distinguished leaders of Michigan government, leaders of education from throughout the region and the state, and the entire Grand Valley community. It is a great honor to be here today.

I begin by solemnly pledging to fulfill my duties and responsibilities as President of Grand Valley State University by leading with full vigor, sound judgment, and respect for every member of our community. I will serve our students and advance the cause of this university with all my skills and energy.

A proper inaugural address includes a history of the university.

In that spirit, I begin. In 1800!

Thomas Jefferson is not a college—he has just been elected President.

Napoleon advances on Vienna.

Beethoven has completed his first symphony.

The Grand Rapids of today is home to a village of the Ottawa tribe.

Forty years later: 1840. So much has changed.

The industrial revolution is underway in England and America.

Michigan is now a state, though Allendale is not yet a Township.

Louis Campau, John Ball and other settlers have arrived. Grand Rapids is now a village of 1,500 people.

Ann Arbor is home to the University of Michigan.

Transcending these forty years of dramatic change, learning and discovery, personal integrity, an appreciation for different cultures, and courage prove to be essential to true progress in our communities and our world.

Forty more years: 1880 and even more dramatic change has taken place.

A great Civil War has been fought, the slaves have been emancipated, but their hope for full freedom is frustrated during the Reconstruction Era.

Electricity is used to light some streets in New York City.

Dostoevski's *The Brothers Karamazov* is published.

The harvest of Michigan's natural resources continues: copper, iron ore, and lumber. Dutch settlers make their home in Holland, Michigan. Muskegon and Grand Rapids are lumber towns.

Grand Rapids is beginning to develop a national reputation for its fine furniture.

Two other great public colleges have been founded—Michigan Agricultural College and the Michigan State Normal School in Ypsilanti.

Much has changed again over forty years. But the basis of true progress has not.

1920. Forty more years have passed.

The War to End All Wars has been fought.

Stravinsky's "Pulcinella" debuts. Sinclair Lewis's *Main Street* is published.

In the United States women have the right to vote. Prohibition begins.

Michigan is now the undisputed center of the auto industry.

The Metal Office company has been founded—the precursor of Steelcase.

State-sponsored higher education is now also available in Houghton, Kalamazoo, Mt. Pleasant, and Marquette.

This site is now an active farm.

At the dawn of what will be called the Roaring Twenties, analytic thought, an appreciation for different cultures, personal integrity, and advances in discovery and learning remain transcendent as the source of true progress.

Another forty years pass. 1960.

Commercial air travel is common.

Sputnik has been launched.

To Kill a Mockingbird is published. "Let's do the Twist" tops radio play lists.

There are 85 million televisions in the United States.

Ferris State and Wayne State are now public universities.

Culminating years of hope, G. Mennen Williams signs into law the authorization for Grand Valley State College.

This site is still a farm.

The year 2000—a new millennium.

Over the past forty years a Berlin Wall has been built and torn down.

The World Wide Web has transformed communications.

Millions of young and old muggles read *Harry Potter*.

John Lennon would have been sixty years old.

The autonomy of Michigan's universities has been reaffirmed by the state's new constitution—ensuring the continued strength of one of the nation's premier higher education systems.

Grand Valley State University is a major university in West Michigan—recognized by outside groups as "Most Wired," "Best Buy," "Best Value," "Highly Selective"—and regarded so highly by students that a period of explosive enrollment growth has occurred.

Today, nearly 20,000 students attend a university that existed only on paper forty years earlier.

Forty years: periods of profound transformations in our economy, culture and communities.

Forty years: the typical professional life ahead for one of our new graduates.

Forty years: a period to come in which massive change will again occur. But what will not change is the importance of scientific discovery, integrity of character, analytic judgment, respect for other cultures, creativity and dedication to learning. They will remain essential for those who successfully lead our communities.

I took the time for this abbreviated history to ensure that we do not neglect a few obvious facts.

First, Grand Valley is a very young university. Our place in public higher education in Michigan is still emerging. We have a magnificent future to create together.

Second, dramatic change is the reality of the decades ahead and the reality facing our graduates as they begin their forty years of professional life.

Third, regardless of the pace of change, those who serve the cause of true progress will possess certain core skills and strengths. Higher education has a critical role in ensuring that our students develop these transcendent strengths.

In forty years, Grand Valley went from creation, through its time as a collection of small colleges, (Thomas Jefferson and William James Colleges will not be forgotten!), to its emergence as an outstanding comprehensive university.

We have much to be proud of.

We have defined our commitment to excellence in teaching enhanced by active scholarship, and we have pursued this commitment with countless specific actions.

Grand Valley affirms the value of a liberal arts education. And because most of our students seek to be successful in professional roles, we have developed high quality professional programs responsive to changing market needs.

Our faculty are outstanding.

We are recognized as a supportive community with abiding respect for every individual.

We are well managed—with prudent fiscal leadership.

We have had generous support from foundations, community leaders and the state in building our university.

Our buildings are modern, functional and well cared for. Our housing is second to none.

We have great athletic teams. Yes—we are the nation's highest scoring college football team! And our athletes and coaches are dedicated to academic as well as athletic success.

Our performing arts programs are spectacular.

In forty years, the length of one professional lifetime, the farm field of 1960 has been transformed into an outstanding university. Grand Valley is one of the great success stories of higher education in the second half of the twentieth century. A success story that we will continue to write together in this new century.

Our newest faculty and staff will build, in their professional lives, the Grand Valley of 2040. While we cannot know in advance of all their successes, of the greatness of Grand Valley in 2040, we know that if we work together as a community over the next five and ten and fifteen years we can further elevate the quality of our university and serve our students even better.

We exist to serve our students. Our students make it possible for us to spend our professional lives teaching and advancing the cause of learning. Our mission is to serve our students, and we can be confident that when we make decisions based on what best serves students, we will make sound decisions.

What serves our students best? I believe it is high quality instruction leading to graduation. The best colleges and universities in the nation are noted for both excellent instruction and high graduation rates.

Today I ask that each of us commit to take the steps needed to increase the number of new, full-time undergraduate students receiving an excellent education and completing their degrees.

What will this commitment involve?

Our curriculum should allow full-time students to complete their degrees in four years, but we should not discourage those who wish to take more time. We'll leave that job to their parents, or whoever is paying the bills! Some students will take more than four years because they change majors, take double majors, study abroad or participate in internships, but full-time students should be able to graduate within four years, and

the great majority of our entering full-time freshman should complete their degrees within five or six years.

This commitment means that we all have a role in ensuring that our new full-time students graduate.

Once we accept a student into the Grand Valley community, a lifelong personal and institutional relationship should begin. This relationship is designed for academic success and personal growth. It is not simply an exchange of money for a semester's worth of educational services!

Grand Valley students must engage their education with their whole selves, and we must fully engage our students. As needs and barriers are identified, solutions must be crafted.

Our academic units must be student focused, prepared to find solutions that meet student learning needs. Their needs sometimes spill out of the neat boxes we create in our department and division structure, and the paths predefined by majors. We must be appropriately flexible and not allow institutional processes and procedures to trump legitimate student needs and interests.

We must improve academic advising. Every student should have a faculty mentor, and every student should receive clear direction about the courses required to complete their degrees. Too often we ask our faculty to meet both needs. It is time to review our delivery of academic advising to ensure its highest effectiveness.

Housing and student life must support our students. Our spectacular new living centers, and our outstanding resident and multicultural assistants have done much already to strengthen our learning community.

These are a few of the ways we will ensure that more of our students graduate. Many other steps will emerge in the months and years ahead from the experiences and insights of students, faculty and staff. While we must be flexible about our approach, we cannot be flexible about our commitment to seeing more of our students graduate.

Our commitment to ensuring that students graduate cannot be accompanied by a reduction in standards—quite the opposite. Ever more rigorous academic programs must characterize the Grand Valley experience.

We must continue to implement the emerging best practices of teaching and learning. We must adopt consistent, simple methods to receive feedback from students and faculty about the quality of our instruction and then be willing to act on it to improve. We must find new ways to use technology as a support for learning. The letters IM don't mean "intramural" anymore!

We will continue to seek full accreditation of our programs, and we will pilot a series of consultations with leaders from other universities around the country recognized for outstanding quality. We must continue to recruit the best faculty—dedicated to scholarship and to classroom teaching. And we must find new ways to support them. Faculty are the core of our institution, the group most responsible for our successes.

We must continue to expand undergraduate research opportunities. Ever more diverse backgrounds must characterize Grand Valley students so that their learning from each other is enriched. Our new general education requirements must be carefully monitored so that our commitment to a core liberal arts education is maintained, and implemented in a manner that serves students effectively.

The goals of improving academic quality and ensuring high graduation rates are equally as true for our graduate education. We have the same obligation and the same opportunities in graduate education as in undergraduate education. For example, we should look for opportunities to selectively enhance full-time graduate programs and increase financial support for graduate students. Success in our professional graduate

programs is critical to the continued development of Grand Valley and West Michigan.

Our undergraduate enrollment growth will slow. We have set the target for our fall 2002 first-time admissions so that undergraduate enrollment stabilizes in coming years. Growth of undergraduate enrollment at the pace we experienced in the late 1990s risks losing the personalized community that distinguishes Grand Valley. We seek to avoid fulfilling Yogi Berra's observation, "No one ever goes there anymore; it is too crowded."

In an ever more rigorous academic environment, those factors that contribute to true human progress will flourish. By studying and implementing best practices, by regularly seeking and using feedback from students and faculty, by interacting with the best of our peers, by further diversifying and managing the size of our student body, and by strengthening our faculty we will move forward with improving our quality.

Our primary contribution to the region is the delivery of high-quality education for our students so that we graduate thousands of highly capable individuals a year. But we make other important contributions as well.

Our commitment to public service in West Michigan must be strong.

Our continuing education offerings must be strengthened and expanded in the years ahead.

We will continue to find selective opportunities for research and service excellence. The Water Resources Institute, the Van Andel Global Trade Center, the Regional Math and Science Center, the Johnson Center for Philanthropy, the Family Owned Business Institute, the Autism Education Center, TRIO Upward Bound, the Hauenstein Center for Presidential Studies and the other institutes and centers at Grand Valley must seek national and regional standing for research and service excellence.

We must continue to develop and maintain vital partnerships with those around us. We welcome area residents to join us for arts and cultural events enriching our community life together. We can and will help the Grand Rapids Public Schools and other schools in our region. We can and will help community groups with our expertise in planning and non-profit manage-

ment. We can and will help meet the pressing needs of our region.

The English poet John Masefield once said, "There are few earthly things more beautiful than a university." How right he was! And how privileged we are to be entrusted with carrying on the creation of this great university.

Together we can continue Grand Valley's ascent. Together we can help our students build their professional skills, their lifelong love of learning, their creativity and their appreciation for other cultures. Together we can ensure that Grand Valley graduates are leaders in their communities.

Our success in the years ahead will build on the successes of those who came before us.

History is not a tidal force of the inevitable. Progress is fashioned by individuals and communities who embrace the challenges and opportunities before them.

Mennen Williams and Bill Seidman, Jim Zumberge and Don Lubbers and the thousands of women and men who over the past forty years created today's Grand Valley seized opportunities and did so much.

So many opportunities remain before us.

A region once dependent on harvesting and processing natural resources now depends on the knowledge, creativity and problem solving of its residents.

The land has been claimed. Buildings have been erected. Standards of achievement have been established and tested. An era of excellence has begun.

It is a great honor to be the third President of Grand Valley State University. I deeply respect the legacy of those who have built this great university. I intend to honor their great contributions by serving our students with all my skills and energy and by working with this community in the years ahead to provide an outstanding education for all who come among us.

Thank you.