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Engineering Luncheon Remarks, delivered at Amway Grand Plaza on May 11, 1983

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Hello ladies and gentlemen. This is a very nice podium too. I didn’t notice I have a clock here. It says 12:48 so you can synchronize. We’re supposed to be finished by 1:30 and we have every intention of making it. It’s really a pleasure to be in this fine hotel, Mr. Wondergem and Mr. Hoxie. This is the first time I’ve been in this room. I made a few snide remarks about the head table before you came - not about the people - but the height.

You know, Amway and Grand Valley State have quite a bit in common. Most recently we’ve been on the DETROIT FREE PRESS “hit” list. They want to hurt them and kill us. I was just in Lansing today and not talking about being killed, but how much money we were going to get to be kept alive at the Senate Hearing Committee. I’m ready to take some bets. I think Amway will probably survive and make money and Grand Valley will survive in its present state and has a better chance of doing that than the DETROIT FREE PRESS has in its present state with the money that it’s losing.
King Richard describes his homeland with its beauty and strengths - all of them that characterize it. His words reveal commitment to England and an almost passionate loyalty and love for it. Now I have lived in west Michigan so many years that I cannot separate my personal feelings and hopes for the area and my professional interests and vision for Grand Valley. I feel about where we live like Richard II felt about England, and I believe many of you do also. This “other Eden, this demi-paradise, this precious stone which serves against the envy of less happier lands, this blessed plot.” All an over-statement when applied to us, but maybe not. At least for those with a little sentimentality in them. We do live and work in a special place, but all the loyalty and attachment to a place is not enough to keep it special except in the imagination of some people.

We at Grand Valley believe we can participate in the healthy future of this “blessed plot” west Michigan. We can play an important role, perhaps an essential one, but only in partnership with business and industry. The population of the tri-county area is over 750,000 and expected to grow. That growth and the quality
of life here depends on the success of partnerships between and among business, education, labor, and local government. For nearly 15 years Grand Valley has tried to develop a curriculum that serves the economic interests of this area. To do so in these difficult times we have eliminated some programs to capture the dollars to expand those that help people to find jobs or advance in the field of their employment.

Today we are here to tell you about one of our new programs that we believe will help people live here and the businesses that look to them for their work force. The program is Engineering Science. It was developed with the help of some of you and others in the various engineering fields. It is the kind of program designed for people who live in west Michigan, want to live in west Michigan, and for people who for good reasons cannot leave west Michigan for their education. It will give them higher technological understanding in engineering and computers. It will provide industry an opportunity for their loyal and proven employees to become more valuable through increased learning.
In addition to explaining our engineering plan, we want to recognize the person who has persistently, patiently, doggedly pursued the establishment of an engineering program in west Michigan - one that suits both the needs of industry and students. Today we salute James R. Sebastian who 14 years ago contributed to starting Grand Valley’s first student internships in our business program and also at that time urged us to begin an engineering program. We were blocked then, but his persistence has finally paid off and we salute him for it.

Jim, I would like you to stand and I want to read what’s on this plaque:

“Grand Valley expresses its profound thanks to James R. Sebastian for his contributions to the development of the college’s four-year engineering degree program as a working partnership between the institution and area industries. It was at his urging and with his generous support that the internship program began in 1969. It has grown to provide practical field experiences for hundreds of students each year. In the years since he has continued to be a leader in establishing close liaison between leaders of business and industry and Grand Valley State. His creative and practical
counsel and his strong support have been vitally important to the college throughout the long period of planning which preceded the inauguration of the engineering program. Through his personal commitment and leadership, this program became a collaboration between the worlds of academe and industry. By supplementing classroom learning with the infeld experience, the engineering degree program helps students prepare for their future careers while also serving area industries whose long-range strength depends upon the availability of technologically sophisticated men and women. Last year in recognition of Jim’s distinguished career, his community service, and his many contributions to Grand Valley State, the conferred on him an honorary doctorate degree, a recognition which he richly deserves. Today we acknowledge his perceptive leadership and his generous support in helping Grand Valley State establish its baccalaureate degree program in engineering.”

Thank you Jim, and congratulations.