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Letter Read at Jack Ryder's Retirement Dinner, delivered in Saginaw on April 23, 1989

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Dear Jack:

I remember fifteen years ago when you came to visit me at Grand Valley. You were considering the Presidency of Saginaw Valley and wanted to know what it was like to be President of a state college in Michigan. I suspect that you were ready to take your chances then no matter what I said, but I thought you were smart to check out the territory. You certainly know now what it is like to be the CEO of a state university.

When I reflect on the times during your tenure as President, your accomplishments are remarkable. Hard times and unreasonable people never deterred you from your objectives. You must have been discouraged, even depressed sometimes. I know. It goes with the territory. Remember in the depths of the last recession when your college, as well as mine, was on the hit list? You knew very well that no colleges were going to be closed. There is no way that this part of east Michigan can be bereft of a state university, but when the heat is on, it's difficult to convince faculty and staff, and alumni too, that they are not an endangered species. When you came to Saginaw Valley our economy resembled a roller coaster. You have ridden the ups and downs through the seventies and the eighties like a veteran of the theme parks. When I observe how you kept everything together, and moved Saginaw Valley forward, to me you are "Jack the Intrepid."

There is one development during your administration that has troubled me. Before you arrived, the Lakers of Grand Valley had never lost a basketball game to the Cardinals. Then, with your
over-emphasis on athletics, conditions changed. I will never forget you and Lila in your red sweaters cheering your teams, women's and men's, to one point victories over us in our field house on the same afternoon. I am sure your successor will listen to those omnipresent voices that want athletic money to be transferred to more justified causes, usually themselves, and the Lakers can return to the halcyon days that preceded your arrival.

The remarkable aspect of your achievements is made visible to the outsider by seeing this campus. If someone knew what was here when you arrived, and returned to see it now, they would be convinced that miracles take place. They happen because of hard work, vision, strong will, good friends, and good luck. You embody the qualities and you are fortunate to have the funds and the luck. In our job we need them all to succeed. You know that. I really don't have to say it, but I wanted to. Though the buildings are obvious, what goes on in them is the mark of the institution. The expansion of this place is the expansion of service to students, and I trust the academic advancement of the faculty.

As I looked at the beautiful Marshall Fredrick work in the sculpture gallery, I was even more impressed than you and Lila suggested I would be. I thought to myself that you are the sculptor of the human conditions that make Saginaw Valley the attractive university that it is.

I cannot conclude this letter of appreciation without thanking you for one state-wide initiative of yours that makes up for all the defeats the Cardinals hand the Lakers. That was your campaign to designate as universities all four-year state institutions of
higher education. You did it. Your will and your political strategy made it happen. I don't know how it has affected Saginaw Valley, but Grand Valley has benefited immeasurably from it. My guess is that you have also.

You and Lila have made a great team for Saginaw Valley. Please tell her that Nancy and I are aware of what she has been called upon to do, and we think she has done a great job. Both of us are sorry to see you leave the Presidency. I wish I had the opportunity to persuade you to stay, but it's too late for that. We will miss you at the events where Presidents and their spouses gather. You were a special kind of leader, Jack, even among your Presidential colleagues - low key, articulate, determined, and generous - the best kind.

Nancy and I are pleased to be invited to your dinner. We know that our job draws and magnifies criticism. It's great when there can be an occasion when your community gathers to say thanks, we understand, and we appreciate. Jack, you have been a good college and university President. I say that to you personally, and for our colleagues on the Presidents Council. Some people are fortunate to wrap up one successful career and move on to another. You happen to fall in that category.

I cannot conclude this letter without confessing to a slight twinge of envy once in awhile. But, if in a quiet moment you admit to missing the excitement, to yearning for the macro world of the university President, just think of me, and I will be even. I hope to see you around the track, whatever we both are doing.

Sincerely,