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These are good times for Grand Valley State University. Enrollment is over 15,600 students, more than a thousand above the previous year’s total. Applications for next year are running more than 10% ahead of last year’s record-breaking number. Why is this happening? There are three reasons.

First, we are assembling a faculty that builds strong academic programs. Our goal is to provide the best undergraduate education in Michigan, and I believe we are moving rapidly towards it.

Second, compared to most universities and colleges of good quality, we offer our product at a low cost. We give great value for the money.

Third, we attempt to create an attractive learning environment. We believe campuses should be beautiful places - with inside and outside rooms that draw people to them and elicit feelings of well being. Those rooms are made attractive also by the equipment in them that assist students in their learning.

As I reflect on the recent developments at the university, most of them carry a strong community component. You have just heard about the breaking of ground for the Richard M. DeVos Center. It will begin the next stage of life in downtown Grand Rapids west of the freeway. It places in the heart of the city a business school, an international trade institute, and a university library. This helps students, but more than that, it adds to and transforms the city.

On the lakeshore, our Water Resources Institute, named recently for Robert Annis, an Indianapolis industrialist who has supported it generously from its inception, is
increasing its activity. Roger Andersen and Bill Schroeder led a drive to build the William Jackson, our second education research vessel. The Jackson sails out of Muskegon and the D.J. Angus out of Grand Haven. Nearly 8,000 students and teachers use the boats each year. These boats are important to their communities, and as the Water Resources Institute becomes the significant fresh water research and education center in our nation, they will become noted for its presence.

Holland is dynamic. Holland and its suburbs is the largest area in Michigan without public higher education. Fred Meijer gave us 20 acres of land to change that. Our Holland campus will open this summer. When we offer a course in Holland it fills up. I predict a Grand Valley satellite campus of 5,000 students before 2005.

That is what's happening, and those three projects will take on a life that will make them expand in the coming two decades. But more can and should happen. Here is an interesting fact. About 50% of our incoming freshman class of 2,500 students indicated a major field of study. Of that number, 50% chose a major in some field of heath care - nursing, physical therapy, physicians assistant, occupational therapy. The jobs are there; the interest is there.

Here is another fact. Henry Hall and Padnos Hall opened on the Allendale campus two years ago. The programs I mentioned are in Henry Hall, with preparation for them in the sciences in Padnos Hall. Henry Hall is overcrowded, Padnos Hall is filled to capacity. We need space for our professional health programs.

Here is the vision. Downtown Grand Rapids is a strong medical center, but it is nothing compared to what it will become. The Van Andel Institute and the Blodgett-Butterworth merger are shaping a future that can make Grand Rapids a center of world
class health care delivery, research, and education. I have met with Foundation members in small groups to share my view that the region’s state university should alleviate its space problem in health education by building in close proximity to the health care delivery and research facilities. Talk about dynamic. These developments in health will be a hallmark of 21st century Grand Rapids. In order to make the best use of space, and have the least duplication, Grand Valley and Michigan State are close to agreeing who should do what as they supply the education component to this far-reaching concept of a health care, research, and education Valhalla.

Gathered here together as Trustees of the Grand Valley University Foundation, you represent the support a university needs to bring about all that I have been describing. You give credence to what we propose. You speak in public and private conversations about the validity of the projects. You urge state legislators and the Governor to support the University. You give money to turn dreams into realities. Your lives are filled with a myriad of activities. Grand Valley cannot claim a big share of your consciousness, but you should know that the share you devote to Grand Valley is crucial to the success of the University’s major capital projects. As President, I am daily grateful that our university is able to secure the help of the kind of people that fill this room today.

I look back on the success of the Making Waves Campaign in Muskegon and Grand Design 2000 for Downtown Grand Rapids. Roger and David are here and I want, publicly, to thank them again for superb leadership in those campaigns. Now we turn to the future and add another project to those underway - a health building in downtown Grand Rapids.
We have an event coming to our Allendale campus in May - the National Science Olympiad. We have been a leader in the regional science Olympiad and now we have the big one right here in west Michigan. David Hecht is the chair of a citizens committee that is helping sponsor the event. David is as much a scientist, technologist as he is a lawyer. The last two years he has led a group to observe the Olympiads at Georgia Tech and North Carolina State. He will share with us information about the forthcoming Science Olympiad at Grand Valley.