Winter 1999

Article for Lanthorn, delivered for GVSU in Winter 1999

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ARTICLE FOR LANTHORN

As we approach the new millenium, I am reminded that our University is almost forty years old. The year 2000 will mark the fortieth year since the State of Michigan granted a charter to Grand Valley State University. Students didn’t arrive until the fall of 1963, but there was much activity preparing for them. Appropriations were made, a Board and President appointed, a faculty and staff assembled, and a building constructed. Forty years is not an old age for a university, but it is long enough to establish an identity. In my estimation, here are some of the Grand Valley characteristics that have emerged in the forty-year period.

Most of the period since Grand Valley’s establishment was a good one to find and select excellent faculty. The generally high quality of the faculty has led to a generally high quality of instruction. With good instruction has come the expectation of high standards for student achievement. All of this is leading the university to a special place as a teaching institution and a place that sends into the professions and graduate schools well qualified graduates.

The liberal arts commitment of the early faculty has left this more complex university with an ethos close to that of a liberal arts college. That ethos comes with high academic standards, and a friendlier, more humane living environment. There is more a sense of community here than at most multi-campus, comprehensive universities. Allendale students tell me they feel they belong to a smaller college community, and they want to keep it that way.

Our particular quality of community keeps our disputes from becoming bitter, keeps us more united than divided, more civil in our dealings with one another, and happier in our workplace. All of this defines the ethos in our institution, a university that has high energy and a constantly changing landscape. The amount of change we have has an excitement about it, but it
causes dislocations because no one can anticipate correctly all of the aspects that change bring with it. Ours is a surprising place in many ways.

Most of the faculty and staff at Grand Valley have never lost the vision that our university exists for the education of students who attend it. That seems simple, but it isn’t. So many personal and political interests can interfere, and do on many campuses. Our faculty and staff always have been more sensitive to the needs of the community around our university than most. That willingness to serve, to look beyond the boundaries of the university itself, has much to do with the spirit within the university.

The good qualities of Grand Valley are in evidence. I hope they become so deeply ingrained that they will be admired and part of Grand Valley’s success at the University’s centenary celebration. There is no guarantee that this will be the case. It depends upon the high standards, the loyal attitudes, and the generous spirits of each generation. Those of us here can take some satisfaction in our legacy, but that satisfaction does not match the intensity of our hope for the success of those who will carry Grand Valley through the 21st century.