8-2-1999

Remarks to Introduce Fred Keller, delivered at the Engineering Building Groundbreaking Ceremony on August 2, 1999

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Remarks by President Lubbers to introduce Fred Keller

I observe the robot with mixed feelings. I taught history, not engineering, so I am awed by machines that I don’t understand. I also have a fear of machines because I often have difficulty making them work, even the simplest ones. When Grand Valley was founded, the groundbreaking ceremony for the first building featured an explosion of dynamite. The Governor came to push the lever that would ignite the dynamite. He pushed, nothing happened; he pushed again and again. Grand Valley got off to a quiet start, but we have been making noise ever since. Fred Keller has a different relationship with machines. It’s difficult to know where Fred ends and the machine begins. They like each other. He persuades them to do his bidding. They get along so well he, at 89 years, long after most people retire, still relates to them on a daily basis.

Fred and Bernie have been sprinkling west Michigan with good deeds for many years and the good health of the area shows it. This latest gift is a natural because it is the largest contribution for a building where machines will be designed and built. It’s the kind of gift machines would expect from
Fred M. Keller. I don’t think machines can express appreciation, though you never know about robots, but engineering students can. So can faculty, Board members, and friends and contributors to the University. On their behalf and with my own deep personal appreciation, I express thanks to you. Without your gift this building that begins its life today would have no life.

The robot that makes me a little nervous, I’m sure, Fred, is your friend already. I know you came early so you and it could relate. Our engineering students designed it so you could turn the first ground, and we expect its fullest cooperation. You and your friend are invited at this time to break ground for the Fred M. Keller Engineering Building, and then speak to us about your hopes for the building and its future.
ENGINEERING BUILDING
GROUNDBREAKING CEREMONY
AUGUST 6, 1999

Opening Remarks by President Lubbers

We are gathered at the Padnos School of Engineering to celebrate another significant move forward in the growth and development of the School. The success of our graduates, and the quality of the School’s faculty, symbolized by Professor Fleischman’s two national teaching awards this year, demonstrate to all that the Padnos School is on the right track. West Michigan needs more engineers and that is what we are about today as we break ground.

On the platform with me today are Mr. and Mrs. Fred M. Keller; Mr. Richard M. DeVos, the chairman of our University Foundation, who at luncheon will speak on behalf of the Foundation; Mrs. Audrey Sebastian, an honorary chair of the fund-raising drive for this building, who still speak to us, and with her husband Jim gave the first gift for engineering at Grand Valley. Mr. Fred P. Keller, son of Fred M. and Bernie, who has always supported Grand Valley’s moves to better serve the community; Mr. David Leestma, astronaut who is returning to Grand Valley to join us in celebrating this leap forward in engineering. Dean of Sciences and Mathematics, Doug
Kindschi, who will introduce Mr. Leestma. Paul Plotkowski, Director of the Padnos School of Engineering, who will invite us to examine the senior engineering students’ projects; and representing the students of Grand Valley on this occasion, Scott Henne, President of the Student Senate.

On these occasions, we appreciate the participation of members of our Board of Control. On the platform today are Mrs. Karen Henry Stokes, formerly with Spectrum Health; Mrs. Jessie Dalman, former State Representative from Holland; and Mr. Jose Infante, the President of Community Shores Bank in Muskegon.

With the demand for engineering reaching an all-time intensity in our region, we had to make plans to accommodate more students and improve the facilities where they learn. Under the chairmanship of John Kennedy, the CEO of Autocam, we launched a drive for $6,000,000. When this building is completed, we can begin our expansion from 425 students to 800 to 1,000 students. We have raised over $4,600,000 to date and we hope to complete the drive by the end of the year. Having faith that we will be successful, we are breaking ground today so we can complete it to accommodate students a year from now.

The generous lead gifts by Fred and Bernie Keller, Audrey Sebastian, and the Steelcase Foundation bring us here today, allow us to begin digging
and laying a foundation. As we look back, we take note of Jim Sebastian’s determination to have an engineering school. With Jim’s persuading, Glen Walters led the first campaign to initiate an engineering program. State funding for the Eberhard Center with engineering facilities included marked the next forward step. Early accreditation, a credit to the Faculty and leadership, firmly established the School. Then a major gift by Seymour and Esther Padnos, along with earlier gifts by the Padnos Foundation for design and awards, carried the School to a new level and gave it a name. That brings us to this event, another level leaping step, and the opportunity to add another name to our engineering pantheon. Today we name this building for a person whose engineering and business acumen has spanned the 20th century, and who is making it possible for students in the 21st century to follow in his train. I will ask Seymour Padnos to unveil the sign the deep secret will be revealed.