8-26-1998

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HOLLAND MEIJER CAMPUS DEDICATION REMARKS

AREN D. LUBBERS

AUGUST 26, 1998

Do you occasionally pause to consider spiritual, political, economic and personal factors that shape your life? When I do, I always come away from that time of reflection thankful that I have found my destiny in west Michigan. From the time of its early settlement, it has had the qualities of life that predicted a special place; good values, hard work and more than its share of entrepreneurial drive. These forces in good times and bad have allowed us in the past century and a half to witness the flowering of a region, to observe and benefit from those forces at work for over a 150-year period. I came to Holland in 1945. Today it is both the same city and a better city. The complexion has changed, but the values are still having their positive way.

Of course life is not theory, its personality, body and spirit created in individuals. It is through persons that these forces I have mentioned have their effect. Today this campus takes its name from Fred Meijer, a person from Greenville who represents and carries forward the ethos and energy of the region. In his person he is one of the major examples of what west Michigan is about. One of west Michigan’s prevalent values is generosity. People are better givers for others’ benefit than in most places, and this land is Fred Meijer’s gift to the people
in the Holland area seeking education at their state university. When I was looking for a campus site in Holland, I saw a ‘For Sale’ sign on this property. Since it was adjacent to Meijer’s, I surmised it belonged to Fred. When I watched a Meijer truck rumble by with the question posed to me, “Why Pay More?”, I thought, “Fred, you’re right.” Fred and I talked as soon as a visit could be arranged. I explained our limited budget, and that a gift of land could generate the completion of a successful project. He and his family agreed.

This summer we opened, earlier than expected, and because we have a Meijer Campus with an attractive, functional building, enrollment for this coming semester is 30 to 35% higher than last year in Holland. Thank you, Fred. You have helped Grand Valley move successfully through several stages. You are doing it again.

Another one of those giants in our land is here. He was industrial arts teacher when I entered the 9th grade in Holland Junior High in 1945. This year he celebrated 50 years in the furniture business. In the early 1970’s, when I visited Gerry Haworth, he told me his company had done $30 million in sales that year. Twenty-five years later Haworth Corporation is international with more than a billion dollars in sales. Gerry, like Fred, makes his mark in business and in his community. Gerry and Dick agreed to furnish the Holland building, a significant gift that helped us bring the project to fruition. When you tour the building, you
will see the high quality of the Haworth product. Gerry, we appreciated what you have done.

I told you what the enrollment for this fall looks like. It is only the beginning. The University wants to reach out to the people of this community. Your legislators have helped us. Your Mayor and community leaders have cooperated in every way. I see this continuing until you have services from your state University that a community of this size and industriousness needs and deserves. Holland now has a fairly comprehensive higher education community. Hope College, one of the first liberal arts colleges, and one of the pillars on which Holland stands, Davenport, a strong private professionally directed college, and now Grand Valley State University with high quality undergraduate and graduate programs. I predict all will continue to flourish, and this Meijer campus will serve 5,000 students annually within a decade.

This event calls for a celebration and celebrations are always legitimized by food. Today we invite you to dine under the tent, choosing cuisine from six of Holland’s finest restaurants – Margarita’s Mexican Restaurant, Meijer Inc., Peking House, Pietro’s Trattoria, Russ’ Restaurants, and Chinese Tai Quisine. For the soft drinks we will enjoy, we thank American Bottling Company for donating them. Before we dine, we have the final act of this program – the ribbon cutting. Ribbon cuttings are dejure at these kinds of events, perpetuated, I believe, by the camera
industry. Today our chair, Donna Brooks, Fred Meijer, Mayor Al McGeehan, and a Holland alumna of Grand Valley, Lupita Reyes, will join me in cutting the ribbon.

Then we invite you to tour the building and enjoy the cuisine.