Remarks, delivered at Secchia Building Groundbreaking on April 23, 1999

Arend D. Lubbers

Grand Valley State University
SECCHIA GROUND BREAKING
APRIL 23, 1999
REMARKS BY PRESIDENT LUBBERS

A Groundbreaking is always somewhat of a symbolic event. The contractor doesn’t count on the dirt turned over by the silver plated shovel. This groundbreaking is more symbolic than ever when you observe the activity just to the north of us. The architect and contractor didn’t even wait for the silver plated shovel. But groundbreakings are really for the purpose of thanking people, for demonstrating progress, not digging holes for foundations.

Today we thank Peter and Joan Secchia. This is another event in their lives that demonstrates what they do with their lives. Joan is smart, engaging and engaged, thoughtful, positive in attitude, friendly and loyal. Peter is smart, ambitious, creative, single-minded when he wants to be, generous and loyal, and sometimes to me delightfully outrageous. These personal characteristics have led to a long record of right decisions. They have led to a life of private successes and public service. This event is another example where the private success line in their lives intersects with the public service line. They are able to give a push forward to public institution, and they have chosen to do so. Specifically, we are here to focus on the Secchia’s
generosity to Grand Valley and to the students who will live in the apartments in Secchia Hall, but many of you who are here are a testimony that this is more than that. You are here because you personally or your organization or institution have found benefit in the private success and public service of this unusual and sharing couple. So today all of us thank Peter and Joan for one reason or another, and in so doing celebrate yet another addition to the life of west side Grand Rapids, which they are helping bring to fruition.

The cast for today’s “West Side Story” are gathered with me on the stage. They are Ambassador and Mrs. Secchia, Governor John Engler, Congressman Vern Ehlers, Commissioner of Grand Rapids’ 1st Ward Ray Schmidt, Student Senate President Victor Cardenas, and the Reverend Father Andrew Lowe. They all have speaking parts; others are members of the chorus who will clap and shout hurrahs. They are some of the most important people in the University’s progress: State Senator Ken Sikkema, Representative Mark Jansen, Representative James Voorhees, and Representative Doug Hart. You honor the Secchias and the University by your presence. Our Board chair, Donna Brooks, and members of our Board of Control Donnalee Holton and Karen Henry Stokes, Bart Merkle, Dean of Students and Vice Provost, Phil Clako, Chair of the Student Housing
Association, and the Rev. Dick Ter Maat, President of the West Fulton Business Association and founder of the Other Way Ministries and Westown Jubilee Housing. Of all the people on the platform, I have known Dick Ter Maat the longest. He was a student at Central College in 1959 when I accepted a position there.

After this prologue, the first part is Father Lowe’s, who will give the invocation.
SECCHIA HALL GROUNDBREAKING

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

When the Governor of the State attends a celebration, he adds luster to it. The demands for his time are so overwhelming that when he selects an event to attend, he gives it a special character. We welcome Governor Engler to Grand Valley today. We now have an opportunity to express our appreciation for his interest in and sensitivity to higher education and its value to the state, and the attention he has given to our University. We know that his close association with the Secchias, their joining together in common cause for party and state, draws him especially to this event, and we are grateful for that.

The Theologian-Preacher, Jonathan Edwards once said, “I assert that nothing ever comes to pass without a cause.” The politics that swirl around government often make us lose sight of the fact that his assertion is true for government too. John Engler has his causes. His politics and position have demonstrated that he works diligently in their name. He delivers when he can. He never deviates ultimately from the goal. His causes seem obvious: a strong economy based on individual initiative as much as possible, aided by the state when necessary; improved education for all of Michigan; and a state where citizens can live in safety. Today he is shining his spotlight for a
few minutes on his higher education cause, and on his good friends and on workers Peter and Joan Secchia. I present to you the Honorable John Engler, Governor of our state.