

2-7-2009

## Casey Wondergem's 80th Birthday Remarks, delivered on February 7, 2009

Arend D. Lubbers  
*Grand Valley State University*

Follow this and additional works at: [https://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/presidential\\_speeches](https://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/presidential_speeches)



Part of the [Archival Science Commons](#), [Education Commons](#), and the [History Commons](#)

---

### ScholarWorks Citation

Lubbers, Arend D., "Casey Wondergem's 80th Birthday Remarks, delivered on February 7, 2009" (2009).  
*Presidential Speeches*. 189.

[https://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/presidential\\_speeches/189](https://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/presidential_speeches/189)

This Speech is brought to you for free and open access by the University Archives at ScholarWorks@GVSU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Presidential Speeches by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks@GVSU. For more information, please contact [scholarworks@gvsu.edu](mailto:scholarworks@gvsu.edu).

Casey Wondergem's 80<sup>th</sup> Birthday  
Remarks by Arend D. Lubbers  
February 7, 2009

Grand Rapids, throughout its history, is noted as a home of people bred to a sense of responsibility and imbued with a work ethic. One of the outcomes of the city's character is a philanthropy that has led to our position as the second most generous city in the nation in the support of good causes. Characteristics make this generosity possible. Good work and organization make it happen. Tonight we celebrate the 80<sup>th</sup> birthday of a man who, as much or more than anyone, has been making it happen his whole professional life. As we identify the "movers and shakers" of recent generations, as Casey likes to call them - those who raised money, promoted the city and region, founded and nurtured strong enterprises, set the political agenda, and elected the public servants - Casey is among them.

He comes from another place, Sheboygan, Wisconsin. Drawn as we Dutch are to the colleges of our churches, he came to Grand Rapids. In his career he ventured beyond in international and national arenas, but once here his life was conditioned by those he met here, most important, Vi, and all the people he worked with and for over a long career dedicated to creative thinking.

When you think about it, he popped up everywhere something important was happening in our community. When you consider all the dinners you attend, buying tickets and tables, blame Casey. He is the founder of the modern fund-raiser in Grand Rapids. His picture should hang in every banquet hall in West Michigan, and though he has probably never cooked more than a boiled egg, he could be considered restraunteer of the decade for all the business his ideas have provided.

When I decided Grand Valley needed the continued assistance of private philanthropy, as it had received at its beginning, I turned to Casey. He helped plan and launch a development organization that has had success to the present day. He is the founder of that success as I am sure he is for numerous causes and institutions. I learned early in our working experience the determination and force of his will as he tackled a job. Casey outlined an approach to an event in a meeting of those responsible for it. A lively discussion followed leading nowhere much to his irritation. Finally he concluded all the talk by saying to his clients, "We are going to do it my way, and

don't piss off your consultant." This comment is part of Casey lore, and though it has a slight taint it can bring discussions back to the point quickly and with good humor.

No comment about Casey's abilities should exclude his sense of humor. He brings sound organization to his tasks and intense focus, but somewhere in the process or reflection upon it there will be a hearty laugh or two or three. His intensity and focus demonstrate his seriousness that mirrors how seriously his client or employer feels about the job at hand. I found that no matter how serious the project or how worrisome some of its aspects, I always enjoyed the work when it included Casey. He likes achievement, but he wants to enjoy himself. Somehow his ability to enjoy permeates his work and gathers up those working with him.

An expert in communications, public relations, and fundraising, is expected to possess creativity. Casey has that, but he has more. He has vision. He can catch the vision of others and contribute to it. Sometimes he provides the vision an extra dividend for those who employed him. I suppose his long, good career and relationship with Jay Van Andel was partially the result of Casey's ability to visualize and understand Jay's vision and concepts. Once Casey visualizes he engages. People have different capacities for engagement. His powers of engagement run deep. He can take a project or an idea, envelop it and wring out of it the last drop of its value.

What I have said about Casey, I jotted down as I reflected on my observations of his qualities as he worked in our community and as I worked with him. But tonight we are here for more than recognizing the contributions of a civic leader. We are here to celebrate a milestone in the life of a friend we love. Our being here demonstrates his capacity for friendship. More than anything else I appreciate the many years of close friendship. An 80<sup>th</sup> birthday should be surrounded by fun, family, and friends, and this one certainly is. But this 80<sup>th</sup> birthday is poignant. There is an empty place, and so we may shed a tear while at the same time we laugh and take pleasure in our friend reaching 80 years. After all, he is good at overcoming frailties of the body as he is thwarting obstacles to his clients and employers' objectives. So we lift our glasses to you, Casey, to Vi's memory and her contributions to your life, and to Tim, Chris, your granddaughter and your grandsons. Yours is a family story, filled with inspiration, and we all bask in it.

Our family and the Wondergems have had pleasant encounters. Our son-in-law, not sure of your name after first meeting, recounted how much he enjoyed the Vander Jewels. He was right. You are jewels and gems, too. Happy birthday! We love you!