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Remarks, delivered at the DeVos Center Dedication on September 7, 2000

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DeVos Center Dedication

Thursday, September 7, 2000

G. K. Chesterton wrote, “The whole difference between construction and creation is exactly this: that a thing constructed can only be loved after it is constructed; but a thing created is loved before it exists.” As I listened and watched, the architect began to describe his creative vision for this building. He was compelling and I was moved by his creativity. I understood that you can love the idea of a building. As construction emerged from the ground, the architect’s creativity began to take form. Each stage revealed new insights of design and function. Finally, it was finished, and I knew that I loved this building. The constructed building fulfilled the architect’s creative thought, and for me, the DeVos Center is as much a work of art as the sculptures and paintings it contains. To Vern Ohlman and his colleagues at Design Plus whose creativity we enjoy tonight goes our appreciation for lifting us to such a high standard of architecture.

And to Tom Beckering, his associates, and many contractors, who construct with skill and finish on time, we offer a salute in gratitude.

The road to this evening's celebration really began in the 1980's when we began discussions of establishing a campus in downtown Grand Rapids. Bob Pew, Steelcase, and other major donors such as the Charles W. Loosemore Foundation and the Grand Rapids Foundation helped us secure the core land for this campus. Through public and private support, we were able to establish our first outposts: the Eberhard Center and the Meijer Public Broadcast Center.

It soon became clear that the University needed to do more if we were to serve the needs of Michigan's second largest metropolitan area. To secure the remaining key parcels of land, Rich DeVos put together a group of benefactors, and by the mid-1990's, the land was acquired.

Then came the campaign for construction. With a goal of \$15 million, it was our biggest campaign at that time. David Frey chaired that effort and completed it in a little over a year. The total contributed was over \$17 million. David brought grace, charm and determination to the campaign and led a dynamic and hard-working Grand Design 2000 committee to reach that goal.

Reaching that goal brings us here tonight. For it is a good thing to do to celebrate when a life-changing event takes place. The Grand Rapids Press in Tuesday's editorial stated, "The landscape of downtown Grand Rapids changed dramatically with the opening of Grand Valley State University's \$60 million Pew

Campus and not just physically. The campus anchored by the \$50 million Richard M. DeVos Center solidifies GVSU's stature as a major player in the state college system." The editorial concludes its first paragraph by stating, "In short, it is a watershed event in the shaping of Grand Rapids' future." You who have fueled this new era in higher education are here for this event of thanksgiving.

Let us examine what you have wrought.

A home for:

- The **Seidman School of Business**, the **Van Andel Global Trade Center**, the **Family-Owned Business Institute**
- The **Steelcase Library** for traditional and high-tech learning and research
- The **Lacks Technology Center** full of computer labs
- The **Beckering Family Carillon** for music
- The **Frey Foundation Courtyard** for our campus green
- Art for everyone, thanks to the **Gordon Gallery** and gifts to our collections
- The **Grand Rapids Foundation Plaza** for study and conversation
- The **Charles W. Loosemore Auditorium** for public gatherings and convocations
- The **Hager-Lubbers Exhibition Hall** for special displays
- **Secchia Hall** for downtown student living
- The **Nancy Lubbers Garden** for nature and beauty

- And finally, the **Dorothy A. Johnson Center for Philanthropy** that will help us understand and maintain the giving tradition that makes such a campus possible.

There are also many others, including the **Sebastian Foundation**, who are major celebrants because they are major benefactors to this facility. The full list of contributors is too long to repeat here. They are recognized throughout this building and on a donor board placed in the Hager-Lubbers Exhibition Hall. I hope you will look at this as you visit the building.

I can't overemphasize what a landmark event this is for our young University as we prepare to dedicate the DeVos Center, the flagship of this campus.

Even before its dedication, the DeVos Center has helped to stimulate other growth. I've already mentioned Secchia Hall across the street. Near the Eberhard Center, the Fred M. Keller Engineering Laboratories Building at the Padnos School of Engineering is nearly complete. In the near future, we hope to have a Center for Health Professions Education on "Health Hill" near the Van Andel Institute, Spectrum Health and other area hospitals.

But tonight the spotlight remains here and it will shine now on two good friends, two friends whose names will live on as Grand Valley moves through the years making its history.

We are here to officially name this building the Grand Rapids Press labeled the “watershed event in the shaping of Grand Rapids’ future” for Richard M. DeVos. Rich has been with Grand Valley a long time. As a Board member in the tumultuous 1970’s, he was a pillar for me and one of our students’ best friends. His was the vision for the location of our downtown campus, and his and Helen’s gift launched the campaign for this building that bears his name. They gave a gift to begin the Family Owned Business Institute at the Seidman School of Business and Rich and his partner, Jay, designated the Institute to benefit from the funds raised to honor them by the Chamber of Commerce. What can I say to him and to her on this occasion when their generosity makes our dreams come true? As said in Twelfth Night “I can no other answer make but thanks, and thanks, and ever thanks.”

Thirty-two years ago Bob Pew sat at the table during my first interview for my present job. Before that he helped Bill Seidman establish Grand Valley. After his assistance in the University’s move to downtown Grand Rapids, it became evident that we were not finished--more was needed. One day I received a phone call from Bob Pew telling me Steelcase was giving the University the Stowe & Davis property. You know now why I always answer phone calls. That gift set the stage. Rich held the luncheon where the money was raised for the rest of the land

and here we are. As you wander through the DeVos Center you will see Steelcase all about you as Bob and the company have continued to help.

Recently, Mary and Bob Pew contributed to the quality of our core business – teaching. Through an endowment that supports the Pew Teaching and Learning Center, he and Mary have permanently enriched our faculty with the support needed to strengthen our teaching.

Is there anyone here who can find a more deserving friend of Grand Valley than Bob Pew? The record proves his loyalty. In recognition of loyalty demonstrated from the beginning, and for making the downtown campus possible, we name this campus the Robert C. Pew Campus in Grand Rapids.

These two men are a University President's dream, committed to do what is right, willing to listen, broad in interests and generous with the resources their intelligence, determination, skill and good fortune have allowed them to accumulate. It is time now to hear from them.