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GVSU Charles H. Irwin Club Remarks, delivered at the Athletic Hall of Fame Dinner on October 10, 2008

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**GVSU Charles H. Irwin Club
Athletic Hall of Fame Dinner
October 10, 2008
Remarks by
Arend D. Lubbers**

I have been President of two higher educational institutions. While I was the incumbent, neither Central in Iowa nor Grand Valley won a national team athletic championship. After I left, both schools won several. And I am being inducted into the Athletic Hall of Fame? I appreciate the honor. Those who selected me believe that I had something to do with the establishment of a strong tradition in athletics at Grand Valley, one that eventually led to National Championships. For that I am grateful because I have always held that whatever a university engages in it should do well. Their approbation indicates that I succeeded in athletics.

When I arrived, the building of tradition had begun. Charles Irwin, for whom our athletic fund is named, and who was the first Athletic Director, had launched an ambitious program for our new college in the cornfields. One of his appointees was Joan Boand, who made sure early in our history that women's athletics would have its share of the power and the glory, and she led our teams to championships after the Great Lakes Conference was established.

In my first interview for the Presidency, Bill Seidman, the Chairman of the Board, the person who recommended my appointment, asked me if I thought Grand Valley should have a football team. There was no doubt in my mind. I

answered affirmatively. Of course, a college that was becoming more residential should have as many sports for its students as it could afford, and weekend football games would become important weekend events. Obviously he concurred.

There are four factors that make our athletic program one of the best in the country. Because of them, good student athletes enroll, good coaches sign on to instruct and lead, excellent facilities are provided for instruction and competition, and enthusiasm for the program builds amongst the alumni and in the community. They are:

- 1) The President's interest in and support of athletics. Without it the program can wander. The spending, so out of control on the high side at so many campuses, has the opposite problem if the President does not care. Grand Valley's four Presidents have cared.
- 2) The ability of the Director of Athletics. The appointment of the Z Athletic Director determines the quality of the program. We have had Z five of them. The four who preceded Tim Selgo each contributed to a Z program that Tim's special skills have elevated to the best NCAA Z Division II athletic program in the United States. Though the Athletic Z Director did not directly report to me, I constantly injected myself into Z his business. It must have been irritating, threatening, and distracting Z at times. They handled me with grace; what else could they do? At Z

least they knew I was interested. I used to tell Dr. George McDonald that he was responsible for winning seasons – even winning specific events. His job was on the line. He survived for more than 15 years and retired at the time of his choice. I wanted him to stay longer.

3) The quality of the University. I was advised often to concentrate on excellence in one or two departments or in one or two sports; become known for excellence in just a few. I was always uncomfortable about that. I wanted all in the university to raise their standards together. That, I believe, is and has been happening. A university with a good reputation attracts good student athletes, and excellence in athletics enhances the university's reputation. They are complimentary, and I think America's healthiest universities are those that succeed as academic centers with a strong athletics program. Grand Valley is one of those.

4) Division II is the right place for Grand Valley. By not allowing ourselves to be pushed into Division I like so many, who in my in my estimation don't belong there, we have won more contests and spent less money. The well-worn cliché expresses my feeling, "I would rather be a big fish in a small pond than a little fish in a big pond." We don't see our scores cross the bottom of our TV screens. I am

happy to trade that for seeing our National Championship games on National TV.

I am a devoted Lakers fan, sometimes close to a violent one when the officiating doesn't meet my standards. I have been accused of calling plays to the football bench from the President's box. I seek eagerly for the results of all our athletic contests. I come close to depression when we lose or place poorly. I exalt in our victories. Laker athletics are important in my life. I thank all the coaches and student athletes past and present who have incited my interest. If measured by interest and caring, I am well-placed in the Grand Valley Athletic Hall of Fame.