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Lake Michigan Center Dedication, delivered in Muskegon on June 21, 2001

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Lake Michigan Center Dedication
Thursday, June 21, 2001 – 5 p.m.

If Grand Valley breaks ground for or dedicates a building the weather is inclement. That is one of the most recently attested laws of nature – it is too cold, too hot, too windy, it snows or it rains. Today is too rainy. At least the inclemency fits the water theme of today’s dedication.

All dedications are special, but some are more special than others. This one may be in the later category because something new is happening here in the State of Michigan. We mark the end of the beginning, the end of the formative phases of our Annis Water Resources Institute, and the beginning of a period of development that can well lead to an institute for fresh water research and education that matches the success of the two oceanographic institutes: Woods Hole and Scripps. To bring us here for this purpose elements coalesced, factors combined, people saw the light, and money flowed. Once again for Grand Valley the most powerful generator for accomplishment was set in motion, the application of public and private dollars to the solution of a problem – how to finance the next step in making Michigan the leader in fresh water research and education.

There is no better location for such an enterprise than a visible campus in a lake front city. Muskegon and Muskegon Lake were ideal for us, and the people of Muskegon stepped up to the financial plate and hit a home run. Chuck Johnson captained the team, and all of you celebrating today helped, and more dollars were raised from donors than Muskegon has seen in some times. The Muskegon Foundation gift that Chris McGuigan will mention, I’m sure, was the rocket that launched us. The representatives of the people were no less zealous in their activity and support. Frank Bednarek was tireless and relentless. He wanted this to happen, and so did the county commissioners. They provided land and cash. Mayor Fred Nelson and the City
Commission were equally in support and facilitated when they could in ways that demonstrate how public entities can work together.

Senator Leon Stille is a tenacious man. When he has a vision, and he shared this one with us, jumps on the bandwagon and will not get off. Governor Engler is one person whose office permits him to stop bandwagons, but this one he chose to ride himself, and with your Representatives Julie Dennis and Jerry Van Woerkem, on board ably guiding it through the House we have a successful parade.

We did not stop at local and state boundaries in our determined search for funds for a cause we believe in years to come will enhance Muskegon and Michigan as a water wonderland. WE took our case to Washington, and our U.S. Representative, Peter Hoekstra. He, Vern Ehlers, and our Michigan delegation came through, and so the United States is invested.

This all began in Muskegon when the University decided to berth its second vessel here while its first boat, the D. J. Angus, remained permanently in Grand Haven. Roger Andersen and Bill Schroeder led the campaign to raise money for a new research, education ship and an endowment to operate it. The campaign was successful and gifts, including a large contribution from Bill and Kay Jackson, brought the W. J. Jackson into being. Looking back even further, we remember successful Water Resources campaigns led by Rich DeVos, aided by Fred Meijer, Bob Annis, the Kresge Foundation, the Kellogg Foundation and many others. Behind all these activities, managing the Institute, encouraging support from private and public sources was Dr. Ron Ward. He started it all in the 1970’s. He brought us to where we are. Now he has decided to retire. Ron, you should have a plaque and it should be placed prominently in the Lake Michigan Center which is more your child than anyone else’s. Will you come forward to receive it?
As Ron takes his leave after a highly successful career, I am pleased to announce that Dr. Alan Steinman has accepted the position as Director of the Annis Water Resources Institute. Dr. Steinman is currently engaged in research in the Florida Everglades for the Federal and State governments. He is bringing some weather with him to spread around in the winter.

Richard DeVos is Chairman of the Grand Valley University Foundation, the organization that raises funds for our University. He was here for the groundbreaking. He and Helen gave to the project. And he is here to represent the Foundation and tell you about the campaign as he does at the successful conclusion of each campaign.

Governor Engler is with us. I consider his presence very important in keeping with the significance of this event as it will be viewed in the future. Our thanks to him and to our State Senator, Leon Stille, both of whom will address us. Chuck Johnson and Chris McGuigan, leaders for us, receive our thanks and will speak to us. The Grand Valley Board member from Muskegon, José Infante, will lead the ribbon cutting or pulling ceremony. They are joined on the platform by the Chair of Grand Valley’s Board, Dottie Johnson, from Grand Haven, State Representatives Julie Dennis and Jerry Van Woerkem, Coast Guard District Commander, Roger Dubuc, whose vessels will play their role today, Frank Bednarek, Muskegon County Executive, Doug Kindschi, Dean of Science and Mathematics at Grand Valley who has ardently supported the Annis Water Resources Institute, and Ron Ward, the one with the plaque.

Before we move on to the next speeches, I am reminded of two remarks made by the anti-hero for those who love fresh, pure water and want to keep it that way, W. C. Fields. If he were here he might dampen our spirits. He said, “I never drink water. I’m afraid it will become habit forming,” and also “I never drink water— that’s the stuff that rusts pipes.”