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Remarks, delivered at the Memorial Service for Arnold Ott on June 7, 2008

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Memorial Service for Arnold Ott – June 7, 2008

Remarks by President Lubbers

Arnold's life is an American story, and a Michigan story. His generation was the last of several generations reaching back to post civil war times when the industrial revolution brought people from the farms to the towns and cities. More people filled the jobs created by industry and fewer were needed to feed the population. Machines began doing the work of people on farms and in cities. The population shift was fully completed by Arnold and the farm boys of his time. There are many stories of success and failures among those who sought a life beyond the shrinking opportunities on the farm. Arnold's was one of the success stories.

My guess is that Arnold's success ranks in the upper five percent of those millions who made the transition from land to office. There are many reasons for that. The term "bundle of energy" was invented for people like Arnold. In his prime with his short stature and manly physique, he even looked like a "bundle of energy". His raving energy carried him into fields and down many paths in his effort to build, to create and to serve.

Arnold came from German stock, noted for their ability to analyze, plan, and work hard. He fit the pattern. Combine those characteristics with his energy, and you have a formula for success. We cannot push the German analogy too far. After all he was named Arnold, a name several steps from his German heritage. His ambition was more American in its nature. Its source derived from what he could see around him, the possibilities in a nation reaching new levels of inventiveness and affluence. It was driven by high intelligence. He came by knowledge easily. Knowledge led to questions, and answering the questions to more knowledge. I surmise that nature and animals stirred his interest in science.

He followed a traditional route taken by bright young men leaving the countryside. He went to college close to home where he could get a good education at a reasonable cost. For him that was Central Michigan University. It was natural for him also as he followed his star to seek his Ph.D. at Michigan State University close to home, and part of his natural environment. He had finally taken his early science interest to its ultimate level, a Ph.D. in chemistry. Arnold was his own farm to market product, and he was ready for the job market.

Before we forge on to find how this remarkable man revealed himself through professional activities, we should reminisce about his loyalty to his alma mater. Did you ever attend a Spartan football game as guests of Arnold and Marion? Nancy and I did on a few occasions. I will never forget the first time. The game was scheduled for 2 pm due to television timing. Arnold suggested that we meet at their Cascade house at 7:30 a.m. I was surprised and bold enough to negotiate an 8:30 a.m. arrival time. We reached the parking lot near the north wall of the great Spartan stadium around 9:30 a.m. and the four and a half hour party began an hour late by the standards of most revelers. I did not realize a five course meal including wine could be served so elegantly before an

afternoon football game. I learned the Ott's desire for MSU victories was matched by the intensity of their pre-game preparations. It became one of their traditions, and revealed their skill at throwing a party, the importance of being with friends, and their enjoyment in and loyalty to the Spartans.

We return to Arnold ready for the workplace. Work was Arnold's middle name. I used to say to him, "You're the only person I know whose telephone is part of his anatomy." He was always conducting business. At Grand Valley we had to provide a telephone for him just outside the Board Room in case one of his deals needed immediate attention. I can see Arnold taking his newly minted Ph.D. to Upjohn harnessing his energy and creativity to storm the halls of research with patents for his new discoveries. This gives us a clue about Arnold. He liked the "cutting edge". He liked to be where new things were happening. Move forward, make progress, find ways to do it. The spirit of an entrepreneur was beginning to show itself.

As usually happens in American success stories, Arnold liked to make money. He risked his money, borrowed some, and established Ott Chemical Company in Muskegon. We saw him reach the highest academic degree. We saw him reach the highest level of success working for someone else. Now he risked all and worked for himself. Success did not elude him. He became an entrepreneur who cashed out. He sold Ott Chemical and moved east to work as an executive for the buyer.

Three things happened in his experience at Com Products. He and Marion found out that Michigan was home, the only place for them. Arnold discovered that the entrepreneurial life was for him. He found in Hilda Holder a person who could assist him in management of his future financial ventures. Back in Michigan he invested. He won some and lost some. He, Bill Seidman, and Ted Doan set up a venture capital company. He helped Amway as it acquired companies with products they wanted. He liked to build. He accepted the risk. He had found his niche where his energy and creativity were at its best. He was a member of the new venture capital industry that developed in the last half of the 20th Century. He earned a place in Michigan business history.

Arnold always wanted to use his professional skills to help people. He worked to make money, but he worked too to help others make money. I think he saw it as a calling. It revealed a deep commitment to serve.

During his Ott Chemical Company days, Bill Seidman asked him to serve. He enlisted Arnold's help in establishment of Grand Valley State College, and Arnold became the longest serving Trustee of a state university in Michigan history. Jackie told me Arnold considered that his long association with Grand Valley gave him the opportunity for his greatest accomplishment.

When Nancy and I first arrived on the scene, we heard from Marion that she was having everyone "up to Glen". Up to Glen meant all of Grand Valley's trustees and spouses and executives and spouses were guests of the Otts at their Glen Lake home to plan for the academic year. This was an annual event with all the feasting and recreation that

accompanied it offered by Arnold and Marion. Being together, sheltered from daily business, Trustees and Administrators began to forge the team spirit that characterizes Grand Valley today. At Glen Lake we asked Arnold questions about complex health and science issues, and marveled at how he could break down these complex issues into explanations simplified enough for us to understand, to perceive how important a fledgling college could become for the region and the state, and to commit his effort to its growth to prominence. His greatest contribution takes a special understanding, one that places service before self. He and Marion will live on at the University through an endowment for the Chemistry Department and a student scholarship in Hilda Holder's name. They will live on for what they did in the early years, and the vision they had for its future.

Arnold was a person who liked to associate. He liked to join others in common interests. Occasionally the associations did not work the way he hoped, but mostly they did. He associated in business, in charity, in having fun. Associates often became friends. There was always friendly help when it was needed, a special remembrance when it was appropriate, help for a friend's son or daughter, a check for someone in distress, and a cheering thought for a wounded heart.

Arnold needed his associates, not only for enterprises in which they were engaged, but for his personal well being. This research scientist turned businessman was a people person. The interaction with others was personal fulfillment, not just a means to professional success or social enjoyment. Kindness directed toward him, I believe was appreciated more fully than is usually the case. The satisfaction that Jackie and Les can take from the care they gave Arnold in his last years comes from his deep well of appreciation for kindness shown. Arnold had a healthy balance between his capacity to demonstrate love, and his need and ability to receive it. And where was Arnold's understanding of love grounded? Of course it came from loving parents, but it originated in the same place where generations of Otts found it, in the love of Jesus Christ. That is why he could see his greatest achievement in altruism. That is why the welfare, success and happiness of others were first priorities. After all, wasn't the greatest sacrifice of all time made for him? This "bundle of energy" this smart hard driving entrepreneur, this person who wanted success always, would kneel with his wife giving thanks, seeking help, praying for forgiveness, and asking that God's love might shine through them. And it did.