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# Remarks at a Groundbreaking Ceremony: October 16, 1997

*by Arend D. Lubbers*



“**F**or which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to furnish it?” That comes from the book of Luke and the answer to the question is the basis for my remarks this noon. Kate Pew Wolters began answering this question in her representation of the gift of land, and I will elaborate.

On my first visit to Grand Valley in the summer of 1968, Bob Pew served on the committee that interviewed me. I soon learned that Bob was always ready to help. He knew the area needed a comprehensive university and “pitched in” when there was an opportunity to move the institution along to higher achievement. He gave and asked others to give. He organized and served — on committees, on the Foundation Board, and on the Board of Control. The Pews, the Steelcase Foundation, and Steelcase Incorporated have sustained Grand Valley and its students from the beginning.

**Arend D. Lubbers**  
has been the president of Grand Valley State University since January 1969.

Shortly after Steelcase purchased the Stowe-Davis Furniture Company, I called on Bob. Grand Valley had established a bridgehead on the Grand in its new Eberhard Center. The success of the Center exceeded expectations, and visions of a new home for the Seidman School of Business, an International Trade Institute, and a library for graduate students and some undergraduate programs filled the minds of those planning the university’s future. I asked Bob to give the University the first opportunity to buy the Stowe-Davis property if Steelcase ever decided to leave it. He listened without comment as only he can do. About a year later, he informed me that Steelcase was going to give the property to Grand Valley. It was like opening the West. It set the University in motion. And for the first time, after their gift of so much time, money, and furniture to the University, we are permitted to place the Steelcase name on a facility, the Steelcase Library. We are proud to do it.

Bob Pew retired from day-to-day operations at Steelcase and from

our Board. Rob Pew took his place on the Board of Control until he left the state, but Kate Pew Wolters managed the Steelcase Foundation during the period of fund-raising for the project we launch today, and is a trustee of the Grand Valley University Foundation. The gift of the Stowe-Davis Manufactory was the essential beginning of what will come to fruition in the spring of 2000.

Once this major parcel of land was secure, three initiatives were necessary to bring us to this event. There were smaller parcels to be purchased and the money raised to buy them; there was a \$15 million dollar fund-raising campaign to match the taxpayers' contributions, and then the taxpayers' contribution secured through the approval of their representatives in Lansing. There has been a great coming together for these initiatives to be successful. Two elected officials in whose districts we now break ground weighed in heavily for this building. For years I have been thanking Representative Tom Mathieu for his help. He is one of Grand Valley's builders. Senator Glenn Steil was the first senator to publicly support the project, and he skillfully guided it through the Senate. I am grateful to him for that and for much more. Often we read or head about the battle between those charged with protecting the environment and those who believe it is overprotected. Our experience on this project and others with representatives from the Department of Environmental Quality is characterized by positive negotiation and harmony. Together we seek to solve problems, not create them, and to Director Russ Harding I express my appreciation. Both Representative Mathieu and Senator Steil will speak for those who through their taxes make the largest dollar contribution.

But there are taxpayers who were asked for more than their tax dollars because \$17.7 million dollars beyond the State of Michigan appropriation was required. Those who shared our vision are on stage and in the audience. Individually, through Foundations and Corporations, they gave generously. They are the ones who came together with the state to make it happen. Initially, Rich DeVos, as chairman of the Grand Valley University Foundation, and Jack Batts, who chaired the campaign to buy the rest of the land, worked a miracle. Led by gifts from Rich and Helen DeVos and Jay and Betty Van Andel, the money came in rapidly and the sums were plentiful enough to buy all the land that was needed. We were pleased to see these partners so successful in business join as partners again along with others to make Grand Valley successful. We were ready to go.

Approaches were made in Lansing, and David Frey led the Grand Design 2000 campaign past its goal. Can there be a store of gratitude sufficient for me, on behalf of the University, to spread it justly among those who should receive it?

As I move toward the conclusion of my remarks and before I ask Tom and Glenn to speak, I must explain to you the relationship between a man and the University. In the 1970s college campuses were wracked by controversies over the Viet Nam War. Toward the end of the decade and early in the 1980s, serious recession in Michigan brought confrontations to the campuses as serious as those caused by the war. Rich DeVos served as a trustee at Grand Valley from 1975-1982, the most difficult years for the institution in its history, and the most difficult I have seen in thirty-eight years as a college administrator. People of his visibility and wealth are obvious targets, particularly in times of turmoil. At times that was true during his trusteeship. Through those days he remained student-centered, offered wisdom when emotion exceeded itself, supported with friendship and understanding those of us under daily pressure, and faithfully attended meetings, coping with the numerous problems the time engendered.

Rich is a vision producer and vision catcher. He can see things others can't. He can catch immediately another's vision and add to it in ways the perceiver could not, making it grander and more exciting. As a trustee he was the first to see clearly where a downtown campus should be. And here we are, starting our second major project seventeen years after the vision.

When his trusteeship on the Board of Control ended, he shortly thereafter assumed the chairmanship of the Grand Valley University Foundation. From that position, he led those who support the University toward the development of the downtown campus while doubling the endowment of the University as well. When it came time to make the push for this building, he and Helen decided to make the lead cash gift. That gift and this groundbreaking is the culmination of the long involvement dating back to the early 1970s. That involvement leads naturally to Grand Valley Board of Control's recognition of it. To do so the Board will name this beautifully designed structure the Richard M. DeVos Center.

We are celebrating Renaissance on the Grand in Grand Rapids. The evidence of renaissance is seen in structures, art, performance, business practice, and in the general pace of life. The energy for

renaissance comes from the vision of individuals and their willingness to do and to give what it takes to follow that vision. Today's symbolic ceremony is both evidence of renaissance and a demonstration of its energy. ❖