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# Remarks, delivered for the West Michigan Public Relations Society of America's Communicator of the Year Award on June 1, 2000

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**Remarks, Acceptance of West Michigan Public Relations Society of  
America  
*Communicator of the Year Award***

I thank you for this honor. To be here this evening with other honorees who represent our alumni, our faculty, and our staff, and to see many friends as well, I have to say that this is a great night to be from Grand Valley.

It's not often that the communication aspects of a university president's job receive the focus you've given me here. I'm grateful to Fred Chapman for his very kind letter of nomination, and I'm humbled by the selection of the PRSA judging committee.

Public relations and a university presidency go hand-in-hand. Building relationships and communicating clearly within those relationships are how we make progress, be it in developing academic opportunities, building campuses, maintaining a positive work environment for more than 1,600 people, or sustaining the interest and support of alumni who now number more than 40,000.

I grew up in West Michigan. I've watched our region grow in astounding ways. I'm proud to play a role in providing this region with a full-service public university.

Our successes at Grand Valley have paralleled those of West Michigan as a whole. Not only have we grown in size and number — we've gotten better along the way. We receive more applications for admission than ever before, but we also turn away more than ever before. The academic profile of our incoming freshman is third in the state, surpassed only by Michigan Tech and the University of Michigan.

Other universities in Michigan are much, much older than Grand Valley, with rich histories and global reputations. Although we've had the fastest rate of growth since the early 1980s, we've consistently received the least per-student state funding of the 15 public universities. We've gone up against much in Lansing to begin to change the tide of state support, but we do think that it's beginning to change in our favor.

In the meantime, though, how is it that Grand Valley has been able to make such progress over the past three decades? It's happened, in large part, because of the

West Michigan work ethic and the dedication to improving the quality of life here. Community leaders throughout Kent, Ottawa, and Muskegon Counties and beyond understand us and support us. We are viewed as one of the state's best examples of public/private partnership. More and more students, traditional freshman and returning adults, are making the hometown university their first choice.

West Michigan is full of success stories. Most of you here tonight are involved in communicating those stories. And may I say, you're doing great work.

The Grand Valley State University success story is written daily by our students, our faculty, our staff, and our alumni.

I've been blessed to be in the position I'm in, for 31 years now, playing the lead role in communicating our successes, and our dreams for the future.

Thank you once again for this evening, and for selecting me as Communicator of the Year.

# Introduction of F.W. de Klerk Former President of South Africa

The Economic Club of Grand Rapids  
Annual Dinner  
Tuesday, June 6, 2000

Thomas Carlyle, the 19<sup>th</sup> Century Scottish historian and essayist, wrote “History is the biography of great people.” There are individuals born at a special time, in an unusual place, for a specific purpose. F. W. de Klerk, our guest this evening, changed the society of South Africa. His life is an example that makes Carlyle’s point. The road that led him to the transformation of his nation goes back to the Transvaal, to an education at Potchefstroom University for Higher Christian Education, and to an immersion in law which he practiced for more than a decade before taking a place in Parliament in 1972. This was a solid professional background for the unknown task that he later would feel compelled to undertake.

But where were the personal qualities formed, those that provide wisdom and intuition, that combine strength with courage and fix the moral compass? His roots are in the Afrikaner culture. He is a descendant of Dutch, German and Huguenot settlers, peoples with character and determination, familiar to those who know American history because they were important at the beginning of our nation as well.

His family grew from these roots to positions of leadership in South Africa. He naturally inherited those qualities that brought him cabinet posts, national party leadership, legislative leadership and finally in 1989 the Presidency of his country. When elected he acted almost immediately. America’s Great Emancipator, Abraham Lincoln once said, “When a white man

governs himself, that is self government. But when he governs himself and also governs some other men, that is despotism. What I do mean to say is that no man is good enough to govern another man without that other's consent." President de Klerk acted upon the same belief expressed by Lincoln more than a century earlier. He freed Nelson Mandela, and took the initiatives that led directly to South Africa's first universal franchise election. He led the peaceful revolution rather than wait to react to what might have been a less peaceful one. His actions guaranteed his loss of the Presidency in the ensuing election, actions which are unfamiliar to us in our observations of incumbent Presidents. His great time in history was recognized by the world when he shared with Nelson Mandela the Nobel Peace Prize in 1993.

Now through the F. W. de Klerk Foundation he devotes resources and time to assure the success and stability of the full democracy that his courage and intelligence brought into being. Aristotle wrote "Dignity does not consist in possessing honors, but in deserving them." I present to you Mr. F. W. de Klerk, not only a *Time* magazine Man of the Year, but one of the world's most deserving citizens.