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Grand Valley State University

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Alumni Speech
Arend D. Lubbers
November 11, 2015

In addressing alumni assembled at past events, my remarks have been light and tinged with seriousness. I have regaled you with descriptions of our cat, Raymond, an intensely loyal creature, whose loyalty is of the kind every university wishes from its alumni. Last year, President Haas announced that in 2015 the 100,000th graduate would receive his diploma, and so he did in April, winning the sweepstakes prepared for him. Tom was justly proud of being President when 40% of those graduates crossed the stage, but I gently chided him because 60% received diplomas before he arrived. But that is about to change. Before he goes gently into the night, as all successful presidents eventually do, he will claim well over 60% of alumni launched into their new world during his tenure. There will be a vast alumni army of women and men who bear the name of Grand Valley. What happened to attract so many? What influence will they have in the rest of this century on their alma mater? These are the questions I ponder as I wander the campuses and attend a variety of events. Tonight, I will give one answer to each question.

Sometime in the 1970s, Marvin DeVries, the Chairman then of the Economics and Business Department, found Professor Donald Klein at St. Louis University. Don's reputation as a Professor of Accounting transcended the boundaries of the institutions he served. That is why my assistance was sought as Marvin unleashed his persuasive powers, seeking to lure Don to Grand Valley. When he succeeded, we all rejoiced, and that celebration was well rewarded.

The next time I paid attention to Don Klein, his students had scored highest in the state on the CPA examinations. Year after year, again and again, it happened, giving great satisfaction to

this new college in the cornfield. We were number one and remained number one for many years. This accomplishment was among the first as we sought to be the best and the first in initiatives that make for better campus life and academic excellence. Here are a few others that support my point that being first and leading the competition has made and makes Grand Valley attractive to students.

When I was interviewed by Bill Seidman, he asked about football. Where I come from, we won football games. With his support, we fielded a football team that lost every game its first three years. Corrections were made, and the long process toward success began, culminating in a national football championship in President Murray's second year, having failed to win in the national championship games during his first. High quality people, players, coaches, and athletic directors have led Grand Valley to high achievement. The performance of Tim Selgo's athletic teams have claimed top ranking for twelve years. Twelve years our athletic program has won the Sears Cup for best athletic program in NCCA Division II. We are number one.

Chick Blue was working in the Registrar's Office when I arrived. Bob Fletcher came several years later as Director of Admissions and then Director of the Computer Center. I don't have time to enumerate the accomplishments of these two, but I want to mention a few that relate to my objective. If the President doesn't insist on "red tape" being examined and cut, it will not be. These two, along with Ken Fridsma in Financial Aid and Jim Willette, the Controller, were assigned the task of red tape cutting and they did; making Grand Valley more student friendly than most of its competitors. Here are some of the changes they made: one stop shopping, providing one place for all student transactions, registration for classes by telephone and then computer, and

application for admission by way of an admissions counselor's hand computer. Grand Valley was the first in all these initiatives. Another objective was to lead the competition in the uses of new technologies in the teaching process and in administration. Bob Fletcher led the way and soon had Grand Valley listed among the 100 most wired universities in the nation.

From the beginning, the admissions staff worked with intensity and intelligence. After Chick Blue and Bob Fletcher, Joan Forrester, and now Jodi Chycinski, admissions was and is way ahead of the competition. Twenty thousand applications for 4,100 places is an enviable position. A state senator from Kalamazoo once told me, "We like Grand Valley. You can take the overflow from Western." You can imagine my satisfaction when we surpassed Western in enrollment. Now who takes the overflow?

The crowning achievement in our striving for first place is the Mary Pew Idema Library. Lee Van Orsdel, the Director of Libraries, should receive a Nobel Prize for creativity for she has changed the function of libraries. From all over the nation and the world, people come to see, understand, and emulate the first "Library of the Future" even from institutions that tend to be skeptical that anything significant can come from the cornfield.

I tend to be critical of institutional pep talks. This isn't one. It is making a case to the alumni because the future here belong to the alumni. Let the facts speak for themselves.

The future depends on many factors, of course, but money is the facilitator. In Grand Valley's fifty years, the State of Michigan has moved from sponsor to major donor. About 14% is

provided for operations from that source instead of 75% in 1969. Western Michigan philanthropists and industries are determinative in shaping the quality of the institution, yet today, so many good causes follow the Grand Valley pattern in reaching out that we will be successful if we can maintain philanthropic market share.

Grand Valley is different from most of the state colleges and universities. It is not yet what it will become. Most of them are. They can be better or lesser, but they are what they are going to be. That makes our future more exciting and more challenging. We have always been different in our emphasis on undergraduate education, our policies toward research and graduate education, our relationship and commitment to community, our athletic policy, and the way we efficiently manage funds. These differences have made for success.

In higher education today, the shrinking number of high school graduates, the reduced dollars in government support, the competition for private dollars, the necessity to add professional programs, and the technological requirements for the delivering of knowledge to students present challenges that threaten the existence of institutions. They need not threaten us. Most of you, most of the 100,000 liked and appreciated their Grand Valley experience. It has been a successful launching pad for the future - which is now your present. The next step that must be taken is for the vast army to reenlist so that their alma mater will be great when it becomes what it is going to be. Frankly, reenlistment is the giving of money. Forgive me when I use this old and somewhat trite cliché "I kid you not." The future of Grand Valley will be determined by the financial engagement of the alumni. Why? Because students more than ever need scholarship aid. Because major breakthroughs like the Mary Idema Pew Library take money so the creativity can become

more than an idea. Because continuing to have the best athletics program takes money. Because the road to success is always under construction.

It is difficult to claim enough thought time in the lives of alumni for them to catch the vision I have described, but we must work on it. The university has an obligation to do it. It will be a long task, requiring organization and talent. Let's be a good example for all alumni by supporting tonight's cause that President Murray has so persuasively presented. I'm talking tough. I'm laying it on the line. Tomorrow, I will return to being "Mr. Nice Guy."