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Senior Neighbors Remarks, delivered on October 23, 2013

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When we were employed no one was likely to say in our presence, “Why did you make that move, stupid” or “there you go again.” People were usually polite, and never said “I don’t like you.” In our retired state we are threats to no one, so it was time to find out what people really think; the purpose of this evening. As I contemplated my response to what our roasters would say, a passage came to mind from the Gospel of Matthew, the Living Bible edition. “Don’t criticize and then you won’t be criticized. For others will treat you as you treat them.” I am taking as my text tonight the second part of that admonishment, “For others will treat you as you treat them.”

We are pleased that Dan Balice was chosen to be the master of ceremonies. He is a non-entity. I am sorry. I should say he is a person unknown to most of you. To Dan’s credit he was one of our leading scholarship winners at Grand Valley before the requirements were raised. Dan, you have learned, is the mayor of Ionia. If you ask a citizen of Ionia who the mayor is they are not likely to know. So few people vote in the election that he has enough relations to vote him into office election after election. You may not know that Dan is a Democrat. His constituents don’t. I think it best that you and they did not know or you might have been prejudiced against him. He is, I think, a Tea Party Democrat. Only Tea
Party Republicans make noise so you don’t hear much from him. On occasions in the past he has been known to attempt denigration of me. This, I believe, is a high point for him in that endeavor and I don’t begrudge him his moment in the limelight.

Mark Murray, thank you for roasting me. If anyone should know the tattered secrets you are the man. You inherited all my failures. You certainly pulled all the right strings to get the job. Didn’t you know that nearly all college presidents who follow a predecessor with more than 20 years tenure fail? Were you misinformed or just naïve? If you examine Mark’s record you notice he usually stays in a job no more than five or six years. Most people with that kind of resume move from failure to failure. Not Mark. He has moved from success to success. Grand Valley had a great President while you were there. Thanks for not screwing it up.

Diana Sieger, we thought was a good friend who might come to our rescue after the anticipated pounding we would take from the mayor, the President, the Athletic Director, and the Ambassador. She was not a token, but she did not come through as we had hoped. Yet our admiration for her remains undiminished. She and I have long interacted and supported one another. We are both survivors. She has done more good during her long tenure at the Grand Rapids Community Foundation than most do-gooders are permitted in their search for the Holy Grail.
Amongst her accomplishments she adeptly encouraged women to fill places in society that were not traditionally theirs, and made society better. She has not limited her efforts to the worthy cause of women’s advancement. She helps children, too.

Someone employed by the university had to come to roast us. Tim Selgo was a good choice. After all I did to encourage athletics, and improve officiating, and all the contests Nancy dutifully attended, I thought I might get better from him. Even after tonight we are proud of Tim. Grand Valley began winning national titles after he assumed the athletic director’s position. He is the one whose mentoring catapulted Brian Kelley into the coach he has become. For seven consecutive years Grand Valley won the National Athletic Director’s Cup for the best athletic program amongst NCAA Division II colleges and universities. The last two years Grand Valley finished second so Tim’s career is in decline. Senior Neighbors got him just in time.

I consider it quite an honor to have a leading citizen of our community who ranks 4th or 5th and former U.S. Ambassador to Italy say bad things about me. Peter always has a way of drawing attention to himself, and well he should. But tonight was over the top; a police guard, a reconstructed hip and leg, a cast perpendicular to his body. Only the trumpets were missing. Peter is known for his politics-Republican and his philanthropies, too numerous to mention. I am told he
does not like to set foot in blue states, but he will fly over them. He is Republican red and has no blue blood. He’s Italian. Recently he entered into repartee with former Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld who told him to “get over it” when Peter was referred to by the Ambassadorial title, “His Excellency.” Even Peter’s critics who may think the sobriquet “His Excellency” is an oxymoron when addressing Peter could not accept that insult to one of our most generous and creative philanthropists. Recently among his good deeds he is associating himself with horses. This time the whole horse as he seeks money for the Sheriff’s Mounted Police Patrol. They have promised to protect from effacement the statues of our past heroes and heroines he has so thoughtfully placed among us.

In addition to our appreciation for the attention focused on us this evening, we think it is entirely appropriate. It would be inappropriate for Senior Neighbors to find a younger couple. Thanks to this well led and managed charity devoted to a healthy physical and mental life for seniors for shedding light on our professional lives even if we come away somewhat singed.