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Speech at the Friends of Alten Reception
by Arend D. Lubbers
May 20, 2010

Like everyone here I have always enjoyed art. In fact, I think I needed it from my young days for a sense of well being and contentment. This has always surprised me since my talent to produce it is nonexistent. Perhaps that's the reason I had the drive to observe the work of those who did have the talent. When I was in graduate school I was fortunate to be 45 minutes by train from New York City. That is when no major and few minor emporia of art were left un-entered. It was a time of feasting for the spirit and for the eye, and the moveable feast never ends as Nancy and I move ourselves throughout the Country and Europe. William Morris, the father of the Arts & Crafts movement in mid-19th Century England, said, "If you accept art it must be part of your daily lives." We have found the truth in that, and I am sure you have, too. Mathias Alten did. I am amazed when I think of how much art producing he could pack into a day. And George Gordon does as he seeks to lay his hands on the art Alten produced. He picks up some art of others along the way and produces his own art with a camera that seems to possess magical qualities as it captures Michigan's beauty.

When we try to remember how something came about, we tend to place ourselves too much in center court. But, after all, it is our memory we are working with. So as I relate how art transcended the departments at Grand Valley that are

given prime responsibility for them and teach and produce them so ably, it is what I remember that I will share with you.

There were two walks that initiated my thinking about art throughout Grand Valley's buildings and grounds. One was a walk through the Princeton University campus at dusk while I was staying at the Princeton Inn. I came back to my room with a glow. The sculpture scattered about the grounds claimed my intense interest. The other was a walk through the newly constructed psychology wing in AuSable Hall. I came away uneasy. My uneasiness, I decided, was caused by the barren corridor walls. In those days the President had some funds available so an art budget was created. Thus birth was given to the objective, "Every building an art gallery. The whole campus a sculpture garden." Bill and Sandy Nicholson provided works from their collection, and Professor Don Kerr was commissioned to paint a mural. We purchased art from alumni who were using their art talents to make a living and AuSable Hall became a Hall of Art.

As our collection grew through gift and purchase and monumental sculptures began to appear in the center of pedestrian walkways, the need for a manager and expander of collections became apparent. Henry Matthews, was pilfered from the Muskegon Museum of Art, given a budget for his work, and Grand Valley was ready to become what it wanted to be; a home for high quality art.

Charles B. Fairbanks in a work entitled “My Unknown Dreams” wrote, “Art is the surest and safest civilizer.” Grand Valley’s art policy gives proof to his statement. Want less litter and damage? Display more art. I will always remember the awed appreciation expressed by students when they first entered this building with \$700,000 dollars of juried art on its walls. There are no busier buildings treated with more respect and appreciation. Art is life for those who must produce and express it. Art is a necessity for those of us who consciously make it a part of our daily lives. Art elicits subconscious feelings from those who do not think about it; feelings that effect behavior, usually for the better.

The next step towards distinction as an art university was the acquisition of a significant collection and the DeVos Center was an important component in making that happen. You may not believe in astrology, but the stars came together in the right positions. George and Barbara Gordon wanted their Alten collection available for public appreciation and Grand Valley had a room, then under construction, to offer them.

As I remember it, George, Bernie Young, a mutual friend, knew that you were thinking about public exhibitions space for a permanent display. He asked me about space at Grand Valley. We had the right room to offer. Bernie set up a golf game, put George and me on the same cart, and by the end of the second hole we had a deal subject to Barbara’s approval. Since then George and Barbara

helped expand the space and the collection. You are here tonight as guests of the “Friends of Alten”. We joined the Friends to support the maintenance and expansion of this extraordinary collection. Some have given paintings as well as money. Our hope is that non-members of you here tonight will be attracted to the cause. For me this Alten collection is one of the most satisfying gifts received during my tenure at Grand Valley. It’s a gift that builds on itself. Not only are more Alten’s contributed, but other important gifts such as Jim and Donna Brooks’ purchase of a comprehensive collection of modern Dutch prints, and Bernie and Betty Young’s Merizon collection join art at Grand Valley.

When the young John Keats observed the beauty of a Grecian urn, he was inspired by this object d’art to write an ode. He concludes it with the lines “truth is beauty, beauty is truth. That’s all we know, and all we need to know.” When I look at the paintings in this Alten collection, and the many beautiful works that Nancy and I see each year, the “Keats feeling” comes over me. I hope your experience is the same.