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Speech to Alumni
By Arend D. Lubbers
November 18, 2010

I am a possessive President Emeritus. I tend to consider you all sons and daughters as part of an extended Grand Valley family; or, if you are significantly advanced on the age spectrum, younger sisters and brothers. I also think of myself as a Grand Valley alumnus. I matriculated in 1969 and graduated in 2001. I am a slow but persistent learner. At least we have all shared the Grand Valley experience.

When students enroll in college they do not realize they are entering a relationship similar to marriage. When a person graduates it is for life. The college experience is like courtship, the graduation the wedding ceremony. It can become a relationship of mutual support. Both parties can take pride in one another. Each can give nurture to the other; the activities of each can be of interest to the other. Especially those who come after as students are the main interest of the university, and need the help of the alumni. They are like sons and daughters in the extended family. They will always need your help.

I'd like to share a story with you of alumni, just like you, who followed their passion for the university and their areas of interest by supporting Grand Valley students. I'd like to tell you the story of Phil and Kathleen Vogelsang and the alumna who led the way for them. Kathleen and Phil are here tonight.

Kathleen came to Grand Valley as what we call a "non-traditional" student. She made the very difficult choice to pursue a life-long dream of a college education as a 32 year old mother of two. She enrolled in the Seidman College of Business to pursue her B.B.A. and she graduated Magna Cum Laude in 1995.

Fortunately for Kathleen, another non-traditional student who attended Grand Valley was watching out for people who wanted to start a college after starting a family life. Her name was Marilyn Sherwood, a 1983 MBA graduate from the Seidman College of Business. Marilyn decided that she would start a “little scholarship” to give women a “little push” to return to school even in the midst of so many other financial obligations.

Through Marilyn’s generosity, the Sherwood Scholarship was created and she was able to support her passion for supporting non-traditional, female students. As luck would have it, Marilyn and Kathleen met at a Grand Valley function. When Marilyn described how much it meant to her to read the thank you letters of her scholarship recipients, Kathleen replied, “I want one of those scholarships.” Kathleen received the scholarship which, in part, helped her go on to get her MBA in 1999. She is now the Chief Investment Officer at the VanAndel Institute in Grand Rapids. As time went on, Kathleen recognized that young mothers were underserved by traditional scholarships. Unlike other non-traditional students, their options for employer funded education or other financial resources are very limited.

In 2005, she turned her passion into the Kathleen B. Vogelsang Seidman College of Business Scholarship for Women Fund. Kathleen’s leadership has had its own ripple effect. The recipients of this scholarship often talk about starting their own scholarship when they are able. Since then, Kathleen has taken on many leadership roles at Grand Valley. She was recognized by the Seidman College of Business with a Professional Achievement Award in 2006 and she is currently the President of the Seidman College of Business Alumni Board helping raise funds for the L. William Seidman building.

Phil and Kathleen's story, unfortunately, includes life-changing adversity in P the loss of their beloved daughter Rebecca (Becca) in 2008. When the Ada Council for the Arts scholarship was initiated, the Council asked to name their scholarship in honor of Becca's passion for the arts. Kathleen and Phil agreed and the Ada Council for the Arts Rebecca Vogelsang Memorial Scholarship was established in her name. Now other young people with the same passion can pursue their dreams. The legacy the Vogelsang's have created at Grand Valley cannot be underestimated.

You have heard the Kathleen and Phil story. The future of Grand Valley depends on how many of the 75,000 alumni will follow their example. The successful colleges and universities of the future will be those that have sufficient dollars behind each student; dollars to provide scholarships for those of high academic ability, and those who deserve a college education and need financial help to achieve it, dollars for the best facilities, equipment, and curriculum.

Grand Valley has received support from people and businesses in the West Michigan community to build it and sustain it. The time is coming when the alumni must take more financial responsibility for support of their alma mater. Sharing appreciation and affection for your alma mater makes it reasonable to see the students who come after you, generations of them, as daughters and sons in an ever extending family. All of us are ready to "pitch in" for the advancement of our families.

On occasions like this, those in charge like to trot me out to make the case. Why not? I love Grand Valley. I believe in it. What a great and deserving place Grand Valley has become. The motto of the State of Michigan applies as you

-wander its halls, attend its functions, and just contemplate it. Si quaeris peninsulam
amoenam circumspice; if you seek a brighter peninsula, look around you.