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Tribute to Rich DeVos
by Arend D. Lubbers
9/30/15

There are communities and institutions, even countries that would not be what they are without the care and wisdom of one person. Today, our focus is on Grand Valley as the institution and Rich DeVos as the person. The first time I called on Rich, he told me Amway made more than \$160 million that year. I tell you this because it happened sometime in the early 1970's and look now at Amway, his company that was dependent upon his genius, and its growth and success. We all have lived through the dynamic advance of this company with its headquarters in our midst and its beneficence.

Fortunately, Grand Valley too progressed, was shaped and defined during this same period. Rich saw in this new college an asset for our community, and he and Helen joined with others, among them their friends, Bill Seidman and Arnold Ott to build Grand Valley into the kind of university that met their objectives.

In the 1970's and early 1980's, Rich was on the Board of Control. He served during some tumultuous times. At one Board meeting, a protesting student decided to moon us. His surprising move did not affect policy, but it was memorable. I can assure Rich, his send off from active duty today will not be accompanied by similar acts.

It was at this time that I experienced Rich's unsurpassed understanding and insight. How he saw things was helpful to me and to Grand Valley as the institution began to define itself. His equanimity and goodwill in times of crisis contributed significantly to our way we managed crisis. His generous spirit and love of people were manifest. This innate goodness and eagerness to be a

servant leader so distinguishes his persona that we tend to overlook the intelligence and alacrity he brings to decision making. These personal qualities brought into the mix early in Grand Valley's existence contributed to the ethos of the university, establishing it as a friendlier, more person-centered place. That ethos being expressed years later by President Murray when responding to a new faculty member who was pleased at his reception - "You are expected to be nice when you are at Grand Valley."

One morning, Rich, Jim Sebastian Sr., Arnold Ott, I think Bill Seidman also, and I met at what is now the Ramada Inn. The outcome of that meeting led to a strategy for bringing Grand Valley to downtown Grand Rapids. But it was more than that. It was the first step in chartering the course for what Grand Valley has become. Rich could always catch the vision. Often, he provided the vision. The Prophet wrote, "Where there is no vision, the people perish." When Rich is involved, there is no perishing.

From that point, the projects piled on one another, the Eberhard Center, the DeVos Center, the Cook-DeVos Center, the Seidman Center. To acquire downtown land, Rich chaired a luncheon and he called its attendants the Land Barons, for at that luncheon, money was raised to expand the downtown campus. Rich and Helen have been the financial heart of all these projects. They have inspired, urged, and paid more than their way. I doubt if all these projects could have come to fruition as they did without them.

“Greatness and goodness are not means, but ends,” wrote Samuel Taylor Coleridge. These buildings, campuses, and programs are the ends. There was a greatness and goodness that made all this happen.

Many people dreamed, worked, and gave, providing the means to these ends. Rich was the actual and titular leader as Chairman of the Grand Valley State University Foundation as the present university unfolded about us. He stayed in the game longer than we could have expected because he believed.

The university must chisel his name on any monument to the memory of its founders. Shakespeare makes two statements about the time to wrap things up. First he says, “The end crowns all.” When we acknowledge the accomplishments, it is a crowning moment. And he writes a play, “All’s Well That Ends Well” and that describes perfectly the retirement of Richard DeVos from the Grand Valley State University Foundation Chairmanship. We would not be who we are without him.