

Ferris Foundation Annual Benefit Gala
Amway Grand, Grand Rapids
November 7, 2008
President Eisler's remarks

Thank you Carol. Wow!!! What an evening!!!

Tonight we celebrate a record evening - more people and more sponsors than at any gala in history. Give yourself a hand. Thank you for making this such a memorable evening.

I want to ask Carol Valade to stand again. She is a wonderful example of what a Ferris education can help create. As a student Carol Valade was a winner of a Victor Spathoff Award for Leadership. She credits her Ferris internship at the Detroit Free Press for getting her that start on a very successful career. Today she is the Executive Editor and Associate Publisher for Gemini Publisher and you know her best for the Grand Rapids Magazine and Grand Rapids Business Journal. Congratulations Carol and thank you for hosting this special evening.

I want to thank my wife Patsy for her strong, continual support as the first lady for Ferris State University and would ask she stand.

At Ferris State University we are truly fortunate to enjoy strong volunteer leadership from citizens all over our state, who give of their energy, time, and talents to help make this the great institution it is today. I begin with our Board of Trustees, would ask them to stand, and encourage you to hold your applause until they are all standing -

Mr. Jim Havemen, chair
Mr. Tom Cook, vice chair
Mr. Gary Granger
Mr. George Menoutes
Mr. Ron Snead
Mr. Art Tebo
Mrs. Sueann Walz

Please join me in thanking our Trustees for their extraordinary efforts for our University.

This evening is a direct result of the hard efforts of the dedicated members of the Ferris Foundation. I ask them to stand and again, please hold your applause until all are standing. We begin again with Sueann Walz, who also serves as Chair of the Ferris Foundation -

Mr. Dick Shaw, vice chair
Mr. John Bradac
Mr. Ken Bailey
Mr. Rick Christner

Mr. Kevin Cross
Mr. David Drake
Mr. Denny Lerner
Mr. Kevin O'Brien
Mr. Randy Phelps
Mr. Tom Scholler
Mr. David Sobota
Mr. Gary Trimarco

With a listing of this size I want to pause and ask if I have missed any foundation trustees. Please join me in thanking them for helping to create this memorable evening.

It is a great pleasure to be here with so many people who know and love Ferris State University. This truly is a remarkable learning institution with a long and vibrant history. Tonight is a wonderful celebration of our University, its people, and their significant achievements-

- We have all-time record enrollment levels;
- We are providing more scholarship support so that more students than ever before can realize the dream of a Ferris education
- We are teaching more students in more locations ~ and through the Internet far beyond our state's borders - than ever before
- We are enrolling our best prepared freshmen ever
- and most importantly we are graduating students at the highest rate in our history.

There is something else that Ferris State University has more of - tradition rooted in purpose. This began with Woodbridge and Helen Ferris' first class of fifteen students, continued through the difficult days of the Great Depression and Second World War, and included literally rising from the ashes of an Old Main destroyed by fire. All of this makes us a state university with a truly unique and special mission.

Just this past March we adopted a new mission statement - thanks to the work and input of many members of the University and our community. Because at Ferris we really do have a sense of history and purpose, this was an opportunity to re-state what it is we do, what we seek to accomplish each day, who we are and what will be in the future. The mission statement is just 31 words long.

Ferris State University prepares students for successful careers, responsible citizenship, and lifelong learning. Through its many partnerships and its career-oriented, broad-based education, Ferris serves our rapidly changing global economy and society.

One of the things I like most about the new statement is its inclusiveness - which has long been a part of our history. Our mission statement recognizes we are interconnected with each other - interconnected as alumni, as people dependent upon education for our state's economic

health, and as members of a world that – despite international differences – is more connected than ever.

I think our University did a great job, capturing that all in just 31 words!

Being here together tonight is a dynamic, living example of those important partnerships our mission statement embraces. As alumni, students, faculty, staff and friends of the University, we take this opportunity to celebrate our shared achievements. We begin with our faculty, whose many honors, fellowships, and professional recognition bear tribute to the significant academic achievements they encourage in our students. Beyond academic achievement and record enrollment figures we celebrate renovated facilities, new academic programs, national finishes for our women's golf and softball teams and yes, state support for a new Optometry Building that we have sought for so long. Finally with your combined help and support, we celebrate a year of record financial support from alumni and friends.

It is a distinct honor to serve as president of Ferris State University. It does not seem possible that I am now the sixth longest-serving university president in Michigan. I mention this to emphasize that this is a time of great change in higher education. In this environment, our university is enjoying greater success than ever, in attracting students and educating future leaders, because we are devoted to an academic mission – newly updated and affirmed – that has been ours for nearly a century and a quarter.

Your attendance here is another affirmation of that mission. If there is even more you can do to help students have the life changing experience of a Ferris education, I urge you to do so.

We are fortunate to have Mitch Albom here with us tonight as our special guest. Through the lens of his writing Morrie's words sum this up well,

“The way you get meaning into your life is to devote yourself to loving others, devote yourself to your community around you, and devote yourself to creating something that gives you purpose and meaning.”

If I could have the house lights one more time, I would ask that our students in the audience stand.

This is who we are, it is what we do, and it is why we are here this evening.

On behalf of our past, current and future students, I thank each and every one of you.