

President's Banquet
Crowne Plaza Hotel—May 10, 2007
President's Campus Update
John A. Martin

Thank you so much for being here tonight. Your presence is an encouragement to me and to our entire leadership team. I am especially grateful to the board of trustees, many of whom are with us here at the Crowne Plaza in Rochester. Quite a number of the members of our board of trustees are from out of the Rochester region. We have a strong board committed to the missions of the College and the Seminary. Having Mr. Randy Henderson, Ms. Debbie Schmidt, and Dr. Lesley Perry join us continues the strengthening of the board. Our board chooses its own members. It is a self-perpetuation board committed to educating itself and becoming increasingly effective. A number of current and former board members have commented to me that this is the strongest board on which they have ever served.

Norm Leenhouts, our long-time board member was quoted in the Rochester Business Journal last week commenting on Roberts Wesleyan College, "It's the most successful non-profit organization that I've ever been close to. They are debt free—its amazing. Yet at the same time they've built a ton of new buildings, and increased academic standards." That is a credit to the board of trustees which helps us shape the vision of what both the College and the Seminary should be.

If the board members in the room look a little tired it is because we are in the midst of our spring board meeting. We have had a productive day, at least from my

perspective. The way we operate is that we meet as a whole board in plenary session during the first morning together, then, we split into committee meetings in the afternoon. Most of the work of the board gets done in those committees. The standing committees are: Northeastern Seminary, academic affairs, business affairs, development, student life, facilities, trusteeship, and constitution and bylaws. The executive committee is made up of the chairs of the standing committees along with the officers of the board: Chairman Lorne Jackson, vice chairs Terry Taber and Dave Hoselton, and secretary Paul Crowell.

As part of our meeting today we had a tour of the Golisano Library which is only about eight weeks from completion! It is a beautiful building that will be so functional for our campus. It is going to have a profound effect on students and faculty alike pushing forward scholarship, the first aspect of our mission statement. I am sure that most of you remember that we have three aspects specifically mentioned in our mission of the college: scholarship, spiritual formation, and service. “Scholarship” because *we are a college*, chartered by the State of New York to be the best possible college we can be. “Spiritual formation,” because *we are a Christian College* which believes that there is a spiritual dimension to people as well as an intellectual dimension, and that better education can take place when that is recognized and nurtured. The third aspect is “Service” because we believe that an educated and spiritually formed person has an obligation to serve...to serve God and to serve humanity through the professions and through the church. We will be talking more about the service component of the mission statement in a few minutes when we present the first President’s Award of Excellence.

Since my tenure as president, during the last five years, many of you know that I have been speaking extensively about both the future of the College and the Seminary **and** the long and storied history of our institution. Roberts Wesleyan College is becoming a university of the highest quality known for transforming leadership in scholarship, spiritual formation, and service. The official seal of Northeastern Seminary has three Greek words, (pistis, elpis, agape) “faith”, “hope,” and “love” inscribed, as well as the phrase “preparation for ministry.” Since 1866 a school has been on our site—it has grown and changed and morphed greatly, but it has remained true to the ideals and purposes of the founders.

At this banquet, in previous years, I have quoted at length from a fine book written by Neil Pfouts called *A History of Roberts Wesleyan College*. I am pleased to note this evening that we are reprinting that history. I am also pleased that Neil and Neva Pfouts are with us tonight, as they always are at these banquets. Are you aware that Neil will celebrate his 90th birthday on May 17th? Please join me in congratulating Neil and welcoming Neva.

From those early beginnings Roberts and Northeastern have grown into the schools we are today, together having about 2,100 students. You friends, the Fellows and the Barnabas Society members are the backbone of the regular givers to the College and Seminary. We could not offer the great education that we do if you were not faithful partners, prayers, and donors.

It does cost a lot to go to college these days. Our costs, and the costs of all of our competitors continue to rise. But let me give you a little different side to the cost of education. First, I need to give you some background.

As strange as it might seem, education is not valued by many people in our society. New York State has always prided itself in being the Empire State and having the finest educational system in the world. However, did you know that only 63% of New Yorkers graduate from high school? In the Rochester city schools the percentage is somewhere between 39% and 53% depending on how the figures are counted. And in one school the number is actually 12%! The 63% of New Yorkers that graduate from high school is comprised of 76% of white students who graduate, 63% of Asian students who graduate, only 37% of African-Americans who graduate, and a dismal 33% of Hispanic students who graduate from high school! New York trails the rest of the nation in every category except for white students who graduate at the same modest percentage as the rest of the nation. That is shocking, isn't it? It is especially shocking since we know that 98.5% of American households have TV's, 86% have cable TV, and 81% have DVD players. By the way, 28% of homes have High Definition TV's, roughly half of those are 40 inches or larger and manufacturers expect 16 million more HDTV's will be added to homes this year. But educators expect the high school graduation rate to stay the same. By the way, more U.S. homes have color TV's than have indoor plumbing!

Education is important financially. I know that money is not everything, but it is important to know the financial impact of education personally and as a country.

Did you know that if you are an "average" person and you graduate from College, over the course of your lifetime you will make about 1.5 million dollars more than the "average" person who only graduates from high school?

Listen to these statistics from 2004, the most recent statistics of this kind:

- ◆ If you don't graduate from high school your unemployment rate is 8.5% and your average salary is \$19,169.

- ◆ If you are a high school graduate only your unemployment rate is 5.0% and your average salary is \$28,645.
- ◆ If you have an associate's degree your unemployment rate is 3.7% and your average salary is \$36,032.
- ◆ If you have a bachelor's degree your unemployment rate is 3.0% and your average salary is \$51,554.
- ◆ If you have a master's degree your unemployment rate is 2.5% and your average salary is \$66,942.
- ◆ If you have a doctorate your unemployment rate is 1.8% and your average salary is \$93,004.
- ◆ If you have a professional degree (M.D., J.D.) your unemployment rate is 1.7% and your average salary is \$114,621.

It does not take a rocket scientist or a brain surgeon to understand that the fastest way out of poverty is to stay in school and earn degrees and skills that will allow you to have a good paying job. But only 63% of New Yorkers graduate from high school! The other part of that equation is don't get pregnant or don't make someone pregnant prior to marriage AND when you marry stay together. The greatest predictors of poverty in America are lack of education plus children before marriage plus a split up home. The facts and figures are there. What a surprise! Living according to biblical principles actually makes one's life better!

Where is the disconnect in the fact that only 63% of New Yorkers graduate from high schools which means that 37% are relegating themselves to low paying jobs. I guess, for many people, the assumption is that someone else will take care of them. Listen to me. We are all "free agents." We all have a responsibility to take care of ourselves.

Doctors, researchers, teachers, architects, nurses, social workers, graphic designers, contractors, musicians, potters, those in criminal justice....these and many more add to our society in so many ways. From a public policy point of view, they pay taxes, buy houses, pay taxes, purchase things, pay taxes, earn incomes, pay taxes! And with those taxes we build roads, and bridges, and schools, and hospitals, and public buildings, and jails, and infrastructures, AND we have enough money left over to let Roberts Wesleyan College and Northeastern Seminary get a tax exemption!

That alone is reason enough to stay in school...and get a job!

Roberts Wesleyan College and Northeastern Seminary are private independent institutions. But we do serve a public function.

A number of years ago, a well meaning business executive asked me why we even bother with accreditation. He said he thought it was a waste of time and effort. I thought for a minute and then responded this way.

“I don’t think that we are going to have a financial audit this year,” I said. A look of horror crossed his face. He responded, “You have to have an audit!” “Why?” I responded. “We are a Christian institution. We are honest. We have integrity with our resources!” “But you have to prove that to the outside world,” he retorted. “Well, we also have to prove to the outside world that we are an excellent academic community,” I said. He got the point.

As non-profit institutions we are supported not just by the students who pay tuition and donors who give us gifts. We also are supported by the rest of the community because of our tax-exempt status. Our neighbors are subsidizing our work by not making

us pay taxes on our property and by allowing our donors to get tax deductions for gifts that are given to us.

We have an obligation to prove to them that we are doing a good job, that we are reputable, that we take our work seriously, and that we are good for the community. Clearly, the Roberts Wesleyan College and Northeastern Seminary have taken steps to prove that.

Education is important for citizenship. When missionaries first went to new areas what did they start, besides churches, of course. They started hospitals and schools. People intuitively know that health care and education are the building blocks of societies.

Education is not merely job training. Education hones our skills in reasoning, listening, communication, appreciation of the arts, and rounds us out as people. It gives us an appreciation for the created world and the people who inhabit the world. It helps us understand and build cultures and infrastructures. It allows us to put together philosophies—political philosophies, theological philosophies, cultural philosophies. It allows us to build civilizations. Those who are less educated often want to tear down civilizations. It is important for those of us who are educated to resist that impulse. People can be smart without education, but they cannot achieve their full potential.

Education is important for intellectual and emotional stability. One of the saddest things going on in our urban centers is the wrong-headed mindset by a number of our youth that it is “not cool” to be smart and get good grades. Comedian Dr. Bill Cosby has decried this and is urging a change of mindset.

People who refuse to be educated or, in some cases, who don't have the opportunity to be educated, by and large don't have the skills later on in life to live stable lives. As you look at the factors that tear down stability, factors like drug and alcohol addiction, heavy smoking, the lack of discipline in relationships, and not knowing how to handle money you find that in general, the less education the higher the incidence.

Education helps us to hone our reasoning skills and helps us be able to navigate through life's ups and downs. And of course, there will always be ups and downs in life. Survey after survey shows that the greater a person's educational level the more that person takes a proactive approach to life. Unfortunately, we have far too many reactors to life and not enough people who take a proactive stance.

Education is important for spiritual maturity. Now some of you may be thinking, "My grandmother was not educated and she was a very spiritual person." That may be. She might have been a wonderful person who had strong faith. But why to we go to the ends of the earth teaching people to read, starting schools and hospitals, and sending off the best and the brightest to educational institutions if it is not important to be educated for spiritual development. I want my pastor and the leaders of my church to be educated, not ignorant.

My grandfather, who had only a high school education, was the vice president of a bank in Missouri. That could not happen today. Education is so important, even in the spiritual realm. Our economy has changed and is in the process of changing even more. The people who will get ahead in EVERY field will be those who are educationally alive, nimble, and adaptable. We must be life-long-learners. We must be readers. We must be aware of the world around us. And we must be ambitious.

Sometimes, Christians shy away from the concept of ambition. I hope you won't. We teach tall boys and girls to be ambitious on the basketball court. And we teach talented violinists to be ambitious in the orchestra and be the best possible musicians they can be by studying and practicing a lot. Why should we not train our students to be ambitious about life? God has built into us a natural drive to want to do well. I hope we nurture that in our students and in ourselves.

There is an interesting trend going on recently in our country. Listen to what the New York Times reported just last week:

Across the country, on secular campuses as varied as Colgate University, the University of Wisconsin and the University of California, Berkeley, chaplains, professors and administrators say students are drawn to religion and spirituality with more fervor than at any time they can remember.

More students are enrolling in religion courses, even majoring in religion; more are living in dormitories or houses where matters of faith and spirituality are a part of daily conversation; and discussion groups are being created for students to grapple with questions like what happens after death, dozens of university officials said in interviews.

A survey on the spiritual lives of college students, the first of its kind, showed in 2004 that more than two-thirds of 112,000 freshmen surveyed said they prayed, and that almost 80 percent believed in God. Nearly half of the freshmen said they were seeking opportunities to grow spiritually, according to the survey by the Higher Education Research Institute at the University of California, Los Angeles.

I was first alerted to this article by our Alumnus Mr. Randy Schumacher who also is our consultant in government relations in Washington, D.C. His comment in the email with the link to the New York Times article was, "It is good to know that other Universities are discovering what Roberts Wesleyan College has know for its whole

existence!” Many attribute the renewed interest in spiritual things to the crisis of 9/11 and all of the instability which students face in their lives. Whatever the reason it is encouraging to me.

I would now like to direct our attention to the third aspect of the College’s mission statement: Service. This evening we are going to honor a couple whose lives have been ruled by service.

Recently, Roberts Wesleyan College has instituted the *President’s Award of Excellence*. This award will be bestowed periodically. Let me read the criteria for you.

The recipients of the *President’s Award of Excellence* are either individuals or groups who exemplify any or all of the three elements comprising the College’s mission of Scholarship, Spiritual Formation, and Service.

By honoring those who model Scholarship, Spiritual Formation, or Service, Roberts Wesleyan College and Northeastern Seminary seek to affirm those attributes as enduring values ingrained in the identity of the College, the Seminary, and in the lives of our graduates.

Please note that I said this award will be given periodically. We are on no timetable to present an award each year. Perhaps in some years we may present two or three awards for the multiple aspects of our mission statement.

This evening we are honored be able to announce the first recipients of the President’s Award of Excellence. The first recipients of any award are very special people. That is the case with our award winners this evening, the first recipients of the *President’s Award of Excellence*.

I would like to invite my wife, Kathryn, to escort Mr. and Mrs. Robert and Mary Hastings to join me on the platform.

With me are two very special people. Bob and Mary Hastings have become dear personal friends as well as good friends of Roberts Wesleyan College. Let me tell you a bit about them.

Mary Hastings was raised in Ontario, NY. Here is a fact that won't surprise you—she was the New York State Rose Queen one year. She graduated from SUNY Brockport with a teaching degree. She taught for twenty years—fifth grade in the Pittsford School District.

Bob Hastings started his career at DELCO, and was on the “fast track” there until he left for a job at Hoselton AutoMall working for Dave Hoselton's father. He was a salesman and then general manager. Bob started his own dealership in 1971. Bob has been known as someone who will help other auto dealers get started.

Bob and Mary have given a leadership gift to the current campaign. Their gift is designed to partially pay for the renovations of what will soon be known as the *Robert and Mary Hastings Academic Center*. How fitting that, in addition to classrooms, the Hastings Center will house the Teacher Education department (because Mary is a teacher), and the undergraduate business department (because Bob is a successful business executive).

But we are not honoring Mr. and Mrs. Hastings tonight for their donation. We are honoring them for a life of service. Listen to just a few of the things that they have been involved in.

- ◆ Mary's love of education and Bob's love of children have been the primary motivation for their giving and service.
- ◆ Mary has been a long-time board member of St. John's Home.
- ◆ They have supported Aquinas, Bob's Alma Mater, providing scholarships to students and they have a fine arts building named in their honor.
- ◆ They support Hope Hall the School of the Holy Childhood. They have taken one particular young man under their wing and are helping him get an education.
- ◆ They are the main sponsors of a summer camp for Inner City young people through St. John's Home. About 70 children participate each year. Bob and Mary actively participate in the camp.

- ◆ They give away 300-350 bicycles each year to needy children in Venice, Florida.
- ◆ They do participate in capital campaigns, but their true focus is scholarships and at-risk youth.
- ◆ They are active participants on the Board of Reference for Roberts Wesleyan College and Northeastern Seminary, a group that meets yearly to give me guidance and perspective.

Bob and Mary, for these and many other reasons we are awarding you the first President's Award of Excellence in Service. You certainly embody the ideals of our mission statement. We are thankful that God has used you at Roberts, in Rochester, and in Florida to be a means of service to so many people. Thank you—we appreciate you.

BOB AND MARY SPEAK

Thank you again. And thank you all for being here this evening. For your information, our baccalaureate speaker on Saturday at 9:00 a.m. is Dr. Timothy Vande Brake, Associate Professor of English on our campus. We are delighted that our commencement speaker is Ms. Johanna Duncan-Poitier, the Deputy Commissioner of P-K through 16 for the State of New York. She is a dynamic force in the New York State Education Department, being over all public and private education at all levels in the State.

For our board members, we resume tomorrow morning at the Ellen Stowe Roberts room in Garlock Dining Commons at 8:00 a.m.

And now to all of you, let me leave you with an old Anglican Benediction which is very dear to me:

And now, go into the world in peace. Have courage. Hold on to what is good. Honor all men. Strengthen the faint hearted, support the weak, help the suffering, and share the Gospel. Love and serve the Lord in the power of the Holy Spirit. And may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all, Amen.

Good night and drive carefully.

