This is a big night for saying thank you. We have much to be thankful for and many people to recognize. First of all, thank you all so much for being here. This is a special occasion where we get to bring those who support WSU Vancouver and scholarships together with the students they’re supporting.

Tonight is also a night where I get to update you on the state of philanthropy at WSU Vancouver and how giving is bringing so many positive things to our campus.

I want to say thank you to our scholarship donors. You are a special group of people. There are students right here in this room who would not be able to attend WSU Vancouver without you. As I have met with donors over the last four months I have seen first-hand the pride that our community and our alumni take in our campus. It has been extraordinary to see how committed this community is to making a WSU Vancouver education accessible. In these difficult financial times we have actually seen scholarship donations increase.

I also want to thank our faculty and staff, who give generously. The national average for faculty/staff giving is 21 percent. Sixty-eight percent of WSU Vancouver’s staff and faculty contribute money back to the university and most of that goes toward scholarships.

Of the nearly 10,000 WSU Vancouver alumni, 16 percent give back to the university and many support scholarships. That’s a big vote of confidence. For a campus just 23 years old, to have a giving rate already 4 points above the national average is rare. We see throughout the WSU System that Cougar alumni are especially proud and loyal. And we are proud of you and very grateful for your support.

I want to say thanks to our students. Every day I’m impressed with your insight, brilliance and fortitude. You make us proud with your commitment to your education, to our campus and to our community. As scholarship recipients, you also have a responsibility to our donors to you your best work and to represent them well.

I’d like you to think about the importance of our donors seated among you tonight. For many of you it is only through their commitment to our campus
that the doors to WSU Vancouver and a world-class university education have been opened. We have some donors who fund several scholarships for our students. And we have some scholarships that are funded by many donors who give 5, 10 or 25 dollars to support your education. I hope that you will remember the importance of their gifts to your success and, as your careers develop, consider providing similar opportunities to those who come after you.

I’d also like to be clear about one thing: WSU Vancouver—our leadership team and our faculty and staff—have a big responsibility here, too. As stewards of your donations, we need to build an institution that is one of the highest quality, but also one that operates efficiently and that responds to the financial difficulties many of our students face. We have always understood that, but these have been particularly difficult times for our students. So we will do more. If the state holds our current funding level, WSU has committed to keeping tuition increases to the level of the consumer price index. And tuition for next summer will be rolled back to 2011 levels. I want to thank our Board of Regents and President Elson Floyd for providing strong leadership in keeping a WSU education accessible.

We also continue to grow to meet the needs of our region. We are strategically adding programs to meet the needs of our community. This year we are offering a new bachelor’s degree in neuroscience. A neuroscience degree provides excellent preparation for medical school or advanced degrees in other health-related fields such as pharmacy and veterinary medicine. We also added another medicine-related degree—the doctorate of nursing practice. Graduates will go on to become nursing faculty in colleges and universities, or will fulfill leadership or policy positions.

Our community has also asked for business hospitality and communication graduates. We’re exploring those possibilities and other programs that serve workforce needs. But we will add them only if we can offer them at the same level of quality and rigor as all WSU programs.

I want to take a minute to update you on some other aspects of philanthropy at WSU Vancouver.

We are nearly two years into the public phase of the Campaign for Washington State University. The Campaign for WSU is a $1 billion comprehensive fundraising effort to increase support for students, faculty, research and outreach programs, and to leverage the university’s impact across the state, nation and world.

WSU Vancouver is responsible for raising $20 million of that $1 billion goal. Thanks to many of you in the room, I’m happy to tell you that we have raised $13 million so far.
The Campaign funds raised in Vancouver will be used at WSU Vancouver—first and foremost—for scholarships. This is our number one fundraising priority because of the great need our students have. State-of-the-art facilities and faculty research will also benefit from The Campaign.

To our donors—your contributions of $251,168 in combination with our endowed scholarship fund of $3.7 million are supporting 120 student scholarships this year alone.

Our focus has traditionally been on undergraduate scholarships, but we are increasingly seeing the need for scholarships at the graduate level. I’d like to again extend my thanks to Val and Dan Ogden, whom we acknowledged earlier, and the Dengerink family, whom we will officially honor next year, for establishing the first graduate-level endowed scholarships at WSU Vancouver.

Our student population is unique. The average age of a WSU Vancouver student is 26. That means it’s not unusual to find a fresh-from-high-school 18-year-old in the same class as a 40-year-old looking to make a career change. Many of our students are first-generation college students.

Attending college is one of several priorities in our students’ lives. In most cases it’s not their only priority. Many students are married and raising children while attending school. A lot of our students are funding their college education on their own. Many students work—either full time or with several part-time jobs to make ends meet.

The economic crisis and increasing tuition have not made things easier for our students.

Today, fully 75 percent—three quarters—of our students rely on some form of financial aid. That can come in the form of loans, tuition waivers or scholarships. But scholarships are golden because they come without an interest rate and a repayment plan—they are simply a gift to further a student’s education.

These kinds of gifts have far greater impact than simply one student and one degree.

WSU Vancouver was established in 1989 to increase the baccalaureate attainment rate in Southwest Washington. Today, 26 percent of the residents of Clark County have earned a bachelor’s degree or higher. That’s compared to 31 percent statewide, 38 percent in Portland and 45 percent in King County.

Advanced degrees are good for our community. College graduates earn higher incomes, and pay more taxes. They are less likely to be incarcerated and more
likely to be good parents. They are less likely to need costly social programs and more likely to create family wage jobs.\(^2\) And, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, people who have earned a bachelor’s degree are less likely to experience unemployment than their non-degree holding friends.

About 75 percent of WSU Vancouver graduates remain in our community to live, work and raise their families. WSU Vancouver graduates work for some of the region’s largest employers such as the City of Vancouver, Columbia Machine, Dick Hannah Dealerships, Peace Health Southwest Washington Medical Center and Vancouver Public Schools.

High-tech business leaders are asking for more engineering graduates so they can reduce their need to import qualified workers to fill skilled technical jobs. In the last two years, Wafer Tech has hired four summer engineering interns and five recent engineering graduates into full-time professional positions. Other local companies are looking to do the same.

WSU Vancouver’s commitment to our community is deep and unwavering. The support that we get from the community is always generous and takes many forms. Tonight, though, we honor those who directly support our students through their philanthropic giving. The needs of our students remain great. I thank you again for your support, and I look forward to working with you to make it possible for even more students to attend WSU Vancouver.