25th Anniversary Dinner
Nov. 7, 2014
Chancellor’s Remarks

Thank you. It’s great to be here tonight among those of you who have supported WSU Vancouver in so many ways over the last 25 years. It’s amazing to see our community supporters, elected leaders, and students, faculty and staff together for this incredible celebration of our first quarter-century.

I am so honored to lead our campus at this important point in our evolution. I am particularly honored to have the opportunity to build on the foundation that Hal Dengerink established during his two decades as our leader. Every day as I pass his photo in the administration building, I reflect on how fortunate I am to work on the Vancouver campus and to follow in the footsteps of someone who brought such positive change to our campus and community. That said, I think Hal would be the first to acknowledge that the success of WSU Vancouver is not due to one man—him or me—alone.

I want to take the opportunity to introduce some of those who have made and continue to make WSU Vancouver successful. Many of our faculty and staff are here tonight. Some have been here for much of our history, and others have joined us more recently. All have made important contributions to our success. I would ask them to stand and ask that you help recognize them.

Tonight is a celebration of our history, and we are particularly fortunate to have THE very first WSU Vancouver faculty member with us tonight. Ken Miller taught in the College of Education in Vancouver from 1987 until he retired in 2003. He started as an Associate Professor of Social Studies Education, and he developed education partnerships with the schools that are still in place today. Ken, it’s really great to have you with us tonight.

Our core mission is high-quality education, and we have a fantastic academic leadership team that works hard to expand our research, develop new programs, expand existing ones, and make sure that every one of our students is getting a world-class Washington State University education. The Academic Leadership Council oversees the academic mission of the campus, and the three vice chancellors and our cabinet lead the administrative operations. These groups oversee the student experience in and out of the classroom. They support our faculty, staff and students, ensuring that we have the funding and infrastructure in place for research and instruction. Would the members of ALC and Cabinet please stand?
Mike noted earlier that I’m the second chancellor of Washington State University Vancouver. While technically that’s true, two other individuals have led our campus during its history. Our evolution as a university began when we were a University Center on the Clark College campus. During that time, George Condon provided the leadership that brought WSU to Southwest Washington. George directed the University Center from 1985 to 1989. George couldn’t be here tonight, but he asked me to send his regards and read a brief statement:

A big part of my job was to introduce WSU to the region. For me, the high water mark is depicted in a photo which has appeared on the WSU Vancouver website—it shows a group of us dedicating the new sign outside our building: “Washington State University at Vancouver.” The Cougar flag had been planted, and the university is today one of the most valuable educational, cultural and economic assets of Southwest Washington.

Many of you celebrating tonight were with me as we worked to make this happen. Thank you as we savor our accomplishment and the benefits it continues to bring to the region and beyond. Best wishes for continued success in all that is yet to come.

More recently, Lynn Valenter served as interim chancellor during the period between Hal’s tenure and my own. She was already well established in our community and on our campus, serving as our chief financial officer for many years. She ably led WSU Vancouver and put her mark on the success of the campus as its leader. Lynn, thank you for the leadership you have provided and continue to provide every day on our campus. Please stand!

On May 10, we celebrated our 24th commencement. By coincidence, commencement coincided with the 25th anniversary of the day the Washington legislature formally established the branch campus system and WSU Vancouver. That’s also the day we kicked off the yearlong celebration of our 25th.

We have much to celebrate. We have thousands of graduates who make a difference in this community and region every day, many the first in their families to attend college. We have established hundreds of partnerships with businesses, school districts, organizations and government agencies in our region. We have a top-notch faculty producing research that has had a positive impact on our region, our state, our country and our world. Our faculty and staff also lead an outstanding instructional program that is responsive to both the needs of our region and the needs of our students. And we have an incredible student body.
For those of us who have come from a more traditional university background, we find it hard to conceive that a single class can have a high school junior, a grandparent in his 60s, a single mother finishing up the same degree as her daughter, who happens to be in the same class. Many are working full-time already, supporting their families, and most need some form of assistance to attend.

I’m inspired every day by our students, by the incredible lives they lead. They attend WSU Vancouver because they are committed to making better lives for themselves and their families. They are here because they understand the value of a university education. They are here because they are committed to our community. To our students who are joining us this evening, thank you for your commitment to WSU Vancouver and to our region. This year our students are led by David Choi and Peter Collier, president and vice president of the Associated Students of WSU Vancouver. Gentlemen, please stand.

We take great pride in the accomplishments of our campus and the impact our institution has had. The achievements of our campus have come about because our community has invested fully in WSU Vancouver. You lobby for us. You partner with us. You donate your time and resources. And, of course, you support us philanthropically. For that we are grateful.

Our commitment to you tonight is that we will not rest on the laurels of our first 25 years. Indeed, we’re looking ahead to the next 25 years. We are finishing up an academic planning process that will result in at least 10 new majors over the next few years. These new majors will match student demand with employer needs. Already, undergraduate programs in integrated communication and entrepreneurship, and graduate programs in electrical engineering and mental health and human services are in development. We are exploring areas of research focus that will bring together faculty from across campus to advance neuroscience and hydrology, to name but two.

We’re also exploring ways we can complement, rather than duplicate, the education provided across WSU. We are uniquely positioned in a region of nearly 3 million people to develop new partnerships with our public schools, building on the rich partnerships we’ve already established, like hosting iTech Prep or the many projects we have with ESD 112.

We have about the closest relationships with our local community colleges—Clark College and Lower Columbia College—as any institution in the country. This year, we are offering our first baccalaureate program on the LCC campus, the Bachelor of Science in Nursing. We have joined with Clark College to support civic engagement and economic development in Southwest Washington. Together, we are preparing our
students for jobs that don’t exist yet and careers that will take trajectories we can only begin to imagine.

Research suggests that students graduating today will generally make five career turns over the course of their work life. We must provide a strong foundation in liberal education that prepares students for a world of work that is constantly shifting and for a life rich in meaning.

As we look ahead to our next 25 years, we will remain focused on academic excellence. But we also know that the needs of our students are evolving. Their success depends on meeting those needs in and out of the classroom. We plan to have an enrollment of 5,000 students by the end of the decade, and we will continue to grow well beyond that number over time. And our student body is becoming more diverse. We welcome that. We must prepare our students for success in a world that is increasingly diverse and an economy that is increasingly global.

A university is and should be judged on many things. Chief among them, I would argue, is the impact of its graduates on its community. Are they ably prepared? Are they advancing their fields? Are they employees who make a difference? Are they engaged in their communities? Are they active citizens?

By this measure, WSU Vancouver is thriving. We have graduated over 11,000 students, three-quarters of whom continue to live and work in our region. That’s a true testament to the opportunity our community has created in WSU Vancouver.

In recognition of our 25th anniversary we asked members of our campus and community to nominate alums who have had a significant impact in their fields and in our community. From that expansive list, we selected 25 notable alumni who represent us and all of our alums—in our community and beyond. This is our inaugural class of notable alumni. We recognized them earlier this evening and you can read more about them in your programs. For now, I would ask them to stand and be recognized.

Every day as I drive up to campus, my spirit lifts a little. Even if it’s going to be a difficult day, I know that I am part of something very special. For 25 years our community has created opportunity for those who might not otherwise get a college education. We’ve worked together to build a stronger, healthier community. I am blessed to be a part of this great work. I thank all of you for your support over the last 25 years and for what I know will continue to be a great community partnership moving forward.

Thank you.