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SPJC Annual Fall Meeting [Remarks]

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Good morning, fellow educators. It gives me great pleasure to greet all of you, my new colleagues in Pinellas County.

As you may be aware, only 21 days have passed since I assumed my new post as Dean of USF's Bayboro Campus. While my wife and sons have been putting our new home in order and getting acquainted with our adopted neighborhood, I have been immersed in learning about the intricacies of the State University System and the multi-faceted operations of USF St. Petersburg.

Although I am new to the area, I am aware of the importance that the partnership between St. Petersburg Junior College and USF plays in providing top-quality higher education to the people of Pinellas County. I have reviewed the documents concerning the articulation agreement between our institutions, and I am impressed with the cooperation demonstrated by our faculties and staffs in the implementation of the general education component, counseling manuals and other programmatic mandates of the 2+2 system. The student services staff tells me that SPJC graduates consistently comprise 60 to 70 percent of the Bayboro student body, and it is these students who are the true beneficiaries of our close and cooperative relationship.

Needless to say, I am pleased to be joining a team that consists of a progressive upper-level campus and a nationally recognized community college. I am aware of your reputation as the leading institution in the Florida Community College system, which is generally considered one of the top three community college systems in the United States. And in the short time I have been at USF, I have already seen some of the very successful products of your educational efforts.
One of your graduates, Debbie Caventer, presided over the Bayboro Student Government last year. At spring commencement, Miss Caventer received our Outstanding Senior Award in recognition of her academic achievement and leadership abilities.

Another of your graduates, Christopher Waldera, received USF's highest academic honor at the same commencement ceremony. He was presented with the university's King-O'Neal Award for maintaining a 4.0 grade point average during his entire college career.

Our current Student Accounting Organization president, Mark Lightsey, previously served as president of your Phi Theta Kappa chapter. And John Jewell, the young man who will preside over the Bayboro Student Government this year, is yet another graduate of SPJC.

One of USF's most valuable staff members, Sudsy Tschiderer, earned both a bachelor's and master's degree from USF after graduating from SPJC. Since 1972, she has been giving leadership and direction to Bayboro's vital Student Activities and Organizations program.

I know it is sometimes unwise to single out specific individuals like these because there are others who could be mentioned just as appropriately. I hope you will understand that I am merely presenting examples as indicative of student achievement, preparedness and excellence, all of which have a direct bearing and relationship, I believe, to the quality of the faculty and staff. Show me a student body which excels academically and I will show you a faculty and staff that strives for excellence, one that is dedicated and one that gives freely of itself.
Our future together, as the educational leaders of this county, is a bright one indeed. It is obvious from the support given by city officials to the expansion of USF in St. Petersburg that higher education is a community priority.

As many of you know, we will soon be breaking ground on the first phase of a new multi-purpose recreational facility. This much-needed addition to our campus will be located off Seventh Avenue between First and Second Streets South, directly across from our existing grounds. When the building is completed, we will be able to significantly expand our student recreation and community events programs. The first phase of the facility will include a combination gymnasium/auditorium, which will provide space for basketball, volleyball and tennis, as well as lectures, community events and programs such as student orientation. I will not mention now the other aspects of phase one and those of phase two.

You may also be aware that the State University System has allocated $600,000 in capital construction outlay funds for the planning of a marine science laboratory and office facility on our campus in 1988-89. We expect to see the allocation of construction funds during the following year.

The city's acquisition of additional land for campus expansion will involve a lengthy and methodical process, and I cannot give you firm details of the expansion until the acquisition process is complete. I can tell you, however, that USF's hopes and plans call for the construction of several new classroom buildings, additional laboratory and office space, an expanded library and a number of additional parking facilities to accommodate our students.
The expansion of academic offerings at USF St. Petersburg is being planned in parallel to our physical growth. We have recently developed a Master of Liberal Arts program, which is being offered at Bayboro for the first time this fall semester. In the future, we hope to create a Master’s program in print journalism in conjunction with our prestigious neighbor, the Poynter Institute for Media Studies. Our immediate goals on the undergraduate level call for increasing our resources for core liberal arts disciplines and strengthening our programs by replacing some adjunct instructor positions with full-time faculty appointees.

As a newcomer to this area, I am very impressed with the achievements of both USF and SPJC, and you are even more aware than I of the extent to which the immediate and extended community have contributed to the growth of this junior college. As we progress together into the future, however, we face challenges that will need to be met with our unwavering dedication to maintaining the educational quality we have already achieved. We co-exist in a county that is experiencing unprecedented population growth, and we share a mission that requires us to continually develop creative programming to keep pace with community needs.

One need that I hope we can jointly address is the creation of more services targeted to the growing number of non-traditional students in this area. Educators throughout the country are realizing that the traditional targets of recruitment efforts—the 18-year-old high school graduates—are dwindling in numbers in this post-Baby Boom era. As community college associates, you are more finely attuned to the educational needs of other segments of our population, including senior citizens, full-time employees, minority students and the rising number of foreign nationals who are relocating in this region.
A few programs for non-traditional students already exist within our system. One example is the Weekend College program at SPJC, which is designed for the lifelong learner. Another is the Bayboro branch of USF's International Language Institute, which began tutoring recent immigrants in the English language last fall. I believe that the development of more of these types of programs is crucial to our mutual mission in this community.

The decrease in numbers of traditional-age students that I mentioned previously demands that we work even harder to recruit and enroll the college-bound students who reside in our county. I would like to see our institutions develop a joint recruiting program that will increase our regional visibility and encourage more students to stay in Pinellas and earn their degrees. Along those lines, I also see a need to increase the general awareness of our institutions among the community. I am discovering that some residents do not realize that they have the opportunity to earn a four-year degree without leaving Pinellas County. We must rectify this situation with an extensive public information program, which I hope we can develop cooperatively.

If we expect to sell more students the idea of remaining in Pinellas County to complete their education through the baccalaureate degree, then we must accept a challenge of major magnitude. We must provide outstanding opportunities and programs, appropriate heterogeneity and diversity in curricular offerings, distinction—uniqueness—completeness—in all our academic profiles, an energetic faculty with outstanding credentials, experience and professional achievements, and facilities and resources to match such enterprise.

These are only a few of the wide range of issues that demand our mutual attention. The USF staff has told me of the positive and productive joint meetings...
our institutions have held in the past. I believe that we should continue and expand this concept on a regular, on-going basis. In addition to a regular general meeting, I hope to propose periodic group sessions involving representatives from our institutions who are concerned with specific issues, such as financial aid, academic advising and student government affairs. After all, the open exchange of information and ideas is the crux of our 2 + 2 system: From different perspectives, we can see common needs and common problems, and work together toward common solutions.

I have mentioned much about our two institutions, but let me remind you that we cannot rest on our laurels and be complacent. The temper of the times and the climate in the community signal the presence of certain opportunities which we must grasp firmly and use to the greatest advantage. Of course, we have our share of problems, many of which have existed in academia for decades. However, today they assume a greater urgency and intensity than heretofore, and thus, their resolution requires the skill and determination, the wisdom and foresight, of only the strong-hearted.

As I conclude, let me mention very briefly four final thoughts which I ask that you contemplate later. In this age of high technology, computerization and robotics, it becomes difficult at times to exercise the true nature of our status which characterizes us as human beings in the first place.

1. I am speaking of the need to extend cordiality and collegiality among us, the consideration and respect that each one deserves, the greater instillment of a sense of true partnership in this educational process, and the capturing or recapturing of the spirit of compassion. This leads me to the second point.
2. Some people call this **affirmative action**, others refer to it as **equal opportunity**. My own nomenclature is the recognition of humanity. Women and minorities and affected classes of all sorts, even today, still suffer from the pangs of ignorance, discrimination, prejudice, racism and sexism. We must turn greater attention to the pursuit of that which is right and decent and proper and honorable.

3. The third point concerns the cultivation of a renewed philosophical approach to professional living, that is, in **making excellence a way of life**.

4. And the fourth and final point: Our lives today are governed frequently by a numerical precision that is equalled only by mathematical exactitude. We use tables and charts and graphics, we resort to data and computer analyses and statistics, then we postulate, project, predict and prescribe. I really have no problem with all of this, except that, beyond these exacting limits is the need to dream, to dream the impossible, to take risks—intelligent risks—and captivate the otherwise unattainable.

Ladies and gentlemen, I am honored to be a member of your team.