President Matthew S. Holland
Scholarship Ball Remarks
October 8, 2016

Each year it has been my custom to close this night, typically with a tribute to a student or set of students who remind us why this gathering, and your support for scholarships, matters so much. As we look back on our 75 year history, I feel to break from that tradition tonight, and take just a moment to honor our past and signal our future, both of which underscore that this institution truly is “A Miracle in the Valley.”

As you saw earlier this evening, the first years of Utah Valley University were absolutely destitute. It was nothing more than a hodge-podge collection of broken down barracks and abandoned exhibit halls. And though I know every single faculty member and student on campus today will find it inconceivable . . . even the parking was worse.

The future of this institution was definitely not written on those first, physical walls. But, it could be seen in the upbeat and determined faces of its students even if those faces were often covered with welding masks. And, it could be especially seen in the indomitable faith and determination of this institution’s first faculty and staff pictured here.

In the lower left sits Hyrum Johnson, the founding director of the Central Utah Vocational School. He is surrounded by his secretary and this institution’s first teachers—who only taught courses in the most rudimentary trades—with the exception of the woman in the upper right. Her responsibilities focused on one thing, teaching “conversational English.” [I don’t know, given what cell phones have done to our kids, it may be time to bring her back!] Ladies and gentlemen I absolutely love the men and women in this picture. Recognizing the desperate straits of so many young people trapped by the cycles of poverty and public works employment, the pioneering men and women pictured here refused to be daunted by insufficient funds, inadequate facilities, and the growing threat of total world war. They just saw a need . . . and went to work. They literally helped repair the dilapidated buildings themselves, even as they developed curriculum, recruited students, taught classes, and established sound operational practices.

Of course, even in their most optimistic moments, even in their very wildest dreams—dreams and visions that kept them going when everything else around them seemed to suggest even the task of mere survival seemed like a bridge too far—they simply could not have imagined that this would someday become a five story buildings housing a library filled with technology that would boggle the mind, spacious classrooms, auditoriums and offices, and entire floors devoted exclusively to teaching the world’s finest poetry, literature, and philosophy. And this, an enormous Student Life Building with numerous, fabulous options for recharging body,
mind, and spirit. And this, a Science Building filled with state of the art laboratories and cutting edge equipment for world class investigation of astronomy, chemistry, physics and biology. And, an entire building that would give the most destitute single parents in our community a safe harbor for their children so these parents could gain the independence that comes with a degree. And, a complex for Aviation and Emergency Services training. And, a stunning campus in Heber. And even a campus smack dab in the middle of one of God’s finest creations, Capitol Reef National Park. . . . And you all thought I was going to say Payson.

And I will tell you what else they could not have imagined. They could not have imagined using these buildings to teach just over 35,000 students, that is according to the latest, though still unofficial headcount report I got this week. But, I suspect that even more breathtaking to them than the volume of the students we serve would be the quality of what those students are accomplishing. You have seen that quality on display tonight, from the food prepared to the entertainment provided. Folks, today, UVU is not just storming the state with student success, we are storming the nation. In just the last year since we gathered here together, UVU students have earned top flight national honors, if not outright national championships, in culinary arts, public relations, personal financial planning, physics, basic science innovation, dance, theater, finance, digital media, trade and technical education and men’s soccer. This is to say nothing, by the way, of all of the new programs that are perhaps too new to have achieved national distinction but are extremely well positioned in substance and quality to meet the emerging and essential demands in our community and beyond, programs like Autism Studies, Sales, Digital Marketing, Computer Science and Cybersecurity.

People are taking note. In just the last few weeks, the Chronicle of Higher Education—the preeminent journal of higher education in America today—has twice featured UVU and its successes. During this same time frame, the noted, Washington DC based education blog called “Education Dive” ran a parallel post, saying, “Schools like Utah Valley [University] … are the future of higher education, where one institution or one system can address the full needs of a city or state's workforce with multiple resources for education.” Ladies and gentlemen, I have never been more proud to be President of Utah Valley University than I am at this moment in our history. We are making a name for ourselves nationally because we have stayed relentlessly committed to keeping our students and their success at the heart of all that we do, pushing them forward with an education that is serious, inclusive and engaged.

All of this said, it absolutely must be stressed that the ONLY way we are able to accomplish this is because of all of you! As I look out on this crowd tonight, I see past and present trustees, regents, and legislators.

With fortitude and forcefulness, these outstanding ladies and gentlemen successfully lobbied and lead the efforts to move a technical college to a community college to a state college
and finally to a university, ensuring along the way that we also got buildings and budgets appropriately funded—including the near impossible achievement of three years ago when UVU alone received 21 million dollars in new ongoing funds to redress a historic inequity.

All of these accomplishments I’ve just rattled off, including the student accomplishments, and all of these buildings I’ve just shown, they are, effectively, your accomplishments and your buildings. The simple fact of that matter is that these things simply would not have materialized had it not been for your vision and tenacity. You put into place all of the raw building blocks necessary to make this institution what it is today. Could I ask every single past and present trustee, regent and legislator here tonight to please stand and be applauded for your extraordinary efforts.

Equally critical to all of these accomplishments are the extraordinary donors that sit here before me tonight. I am nothing short of stunned at what you have done to build up this institution and the students it serves. After my first year in office, it became manifestly clear to me that the only way this institution could truly realize its full destiny and obligations to the students in this region would be to achieve vastly greater levels of support in fundraising. This was a daunting thought given that for roughly 70 years this school had been graduating carpenters and electricians and nurses and a myriad of other trade and technical arts specialist who did very fine, noble and needed work but who often did not end up making much money over the course of a lifetime. I predict the time will come when it will be primarily the highly distinguished alumni of this institution who will step forward and support it in unparalleled ways. But that time was not now. No, our support thus far has had to come primarily from those who had no other tie to this institution except a belief in our unique educational mission.

But support it you did! Please allow me to quantify and specify. As we started down this path roughly seven years ago, I looked ahead at what I knew this institution would need, and I also knew this historic anniversary was looming. As I reflected on both of these things with several key colleagues in our development operation, we wondered if there was any way possible to raise 75 million dollars in hard cash, or hard cash pledges, by the 75th anniversary. Nothing even close to this had been ever been accomplished at this school and such a short time frame. But, the fact of the matter was, that was roughly how much money this institution needed from outside sources to truly transform itself from a strong state college to a bona fide and nationally distinctive university. And, so, we went to work. More importantly, you responded. As of tonight, in the last seven years you have given UVU and its students just over 87 million dollars.

What an extraordinary testament to your large-heartedness and your devotion to students. It also a tremendous reflection of your confidence in our ability to be good stewards of your hard earned resources. We receive this trust with utmost honor and gratitude.
For your information, this $87 million has been directed toward a wide variety of student and university needs.

- $46.5 million for new facilities. This year alone, we have or soon will break ground on three of these buildings – The Cole Nellesen Autism Building, the NUVI Basketball Practice Facility, and the Performing Arts Center, complete with a new Concert Hall, Proscenium Theatre, and a Dance recital hall in addition to a Music recital hall and dozens of offices and student practice spaces.
- $18 million for new or enhanced academic programming
- $4 million for faculty, including $3 million which will directly support the first endowed chair position at UVU—something we will announce in more detail next month.
- $4 million has been generously given and simply marked for support in UVU areas of greatest need
- And finally, for what is so central to everything we do, and for what we truly celebrate here tonight, $15 million has been directly allocated for student scholarships.

My dear legislators, trustees, regents, and donors, on behalf of thousands and thousands of students, and hundreds and hundreds of faculty and staff let me express our complete gratitude for all you have done and continue to do.

Now, as we note these remarkable accomplishments and milestones, the question inevitably becomes, what does the next seventy years look like? For the last 18 months, we have been wrestling with that very question. In particular we have been at work on a comprehensive master plan that will include the broad contours of how academic programming and personnel will develop over the next couple of decades, and a highly detailed set of drawings for how to make the campus infrastructure and footprint work for the next 75 years, including what will happen on the roughly 225 acres on the former Geneva steel site in Vineyard we purchased several years ago, and the unexpected possibilities this creates for us back on this main campus. This is not the time or place to have a detailed discussion about such matters, but I will tell you this, the plan we have is an immensely exciting and innovative response to the aggressive growth forecast for this institution—growth that speaks to not just the natural demographics of this region, but also the surging thirst students around the region, state, and nation have for the educational product and environment we are creating here at UVU with your help. Now, if you are really curious about this plan, you can look forward to November 18 when we will present much of it for approval to the Board of Regents—a public meeting that will be held on our campus and will effectively serve as the culminating moment of our 75th anniversary.

While I am not giving you anything but a teaser about our masterplan for that meeting, I will say more about a very special event that will happen immediately after the Board of Regents is over and has, hopefully, endorsed our plan for the next 75 years. Throughout the evening we have reflected with pride on our past, celebrated with joy out remarkable present, and looked
with great anticipation at the bright future before us. That is really what anniversaries are all about, is it not? Well, to culminate our 75th, we have been at work for a number of years on a project that helps us reflect on the brilliant past, present and future of not just UVU, but of all human knowledge.

On November 18th, we will unveil a monumental work of stained glass art that chronicles the human quest for intellectual advancement and progress. Entitled Roots of Knowledge, this fusion of art, education and public space, starts with the dawn of creation, sweeps to the current day, and points to the future, highlighting humankind’s highest achievements in architecture, law, medicine, literature, science, technology, government, navigation, music, philosophy, art, religion, and economics. In 80 different panels, stretching 10 feet high and nearly 200 feet wide, thousands of historical figures, artifacts, and events are captured in this bright and brilliant mosaic of 60,000 individual pieces of glass, as well as actual rock, fossils, coins, meteorite, and petrified wood. This bold and large-scale permanent installation will anchor the artistically undulating wall of windows at the entrance to our library.

One of the things I love the most about this project is the way it embodies all of our core themes. It is unquestionably a serious exploration and recreation of the most important practical discoveries and intellectual advancements the world has ever seen. It inclusively reaches across time, space, and disciplines to showcase the contributions of all kinds of peoples and cultures. And, it was created by and for the medium of engaged learning which stands at the pedagogical heart of the institution.

A much more modest version of this project was originally conceived and pitched to me by the exceptionally talented Tom Holdman, a world-renowned, artist who got his launch while a young student here at UVU, and who is here with us tonight along with his wife Gail, and his son, TJ, who are themselves, active partners with Tom on the project. From the moment Tom and I began discussing the possibility of installing the windows at UVU, the project began to grow in scope, creativity, and richness of detail. In no time at all, we were moving full speed ahead, and doing so supported by a team of 26 UVU scholars providing substantive expertise and thematic insight into the selection and rendering of content of each panel to achieve a more comprehensive, accurate and compelling narrative. In the spirit of tonight’s proceedings, perhaps the most important footnote is that over 350 UVU students have already participated in the project as painters, project managers, programmers, designers, and artists.

Furthermore, the Roots of Knowledge windows will themselves be an interactive, engaging exhibit. An app will be created which will guide viewers through each of the panels, relaying the historic reality behind each detailed story. In addition to general ed and capstone courses here at UVU that will be designed around the windows, a partnership has already been struck with the Utah Education Network to facilitate learning opportunities for elementary and
secondary schools in the area. The head of Utah Tourism believes it will very quickly become a premier destination spot for intellectually inquisitive locals and state visitors alike. Our vision is that just was we honor our storied past here at UVU to propel us to ever greater future, we believe that this interactive, creative, visually alluring medium will inspire generation after generation to grasp the knowledge of the past to create the needed knowledge of the future. What better way to celebrate our 75 years strong of helping students succeed.

As we come to the end of our evening, I wanted to turn our attention back to Hyrum Johnson, the man whose enthusiasm and dedication to vocational education and his ‘never-say-die’ attitude were instrumental in getting the Central Utah Vocational School started. He struggled during his entire administration to keep the school alive. He was a tireless worker… he believed in… education totally and was disappointed that others did not [always] share his enthusiasm… He became so engrossed [in the development of the school] that his health was in jeopardy toward the end of his administration.”

Ladies and gentlemen, I am not asking you to break your health in the service and support of this institution. I believe those kinds of sacrifices are now behind us… if not illegal. In fact, I firmly believe that we have reached 75 years of strength because the faculty, staff, administrators, and you, our tremendous donors, already possess and demonstrate the spirit of Hyrum Johnson. Through selfless giving, you have enabled us to achieve tremendous heights. Think of where we have come from and where we are today. Now, just imagine where we are going. As I have said before, our present is so much grander than our past but it is not nearly as grand as our future. Our best days and finest accomplishments are ahead of us, not behind us. Our task as we head into the next 75 years is to remind ourselves to maintain that spirit of Hyrum, the one that tells us, “Keep going, give it your best, do it for the students.” We have 75 years of strength on which to build. Together with you, I am so excited to see the next 75 years as we become ever stronger still.