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2012 April 27 - Spring Gathering Remarks

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Spring Gathering Remarks
April 27, 2012
1:15 p.m.
Amphitheatre

Thank you and good afternoon. It is my pleasure to welcome you to the 2012 Spring Gathering—something that I hope will become an annual event to mark the close of each academic year. As we go about our work here at East Tennessee State University, we often do not take the time to talk and simply enjoy the company of our colleagues. That, in large part, is what today is all about.

Music is a vital part of the life of ETSU, and it has been since 1911. I am proud to introduce this afternoon the members of the East Tennessee State University Celtic Band, whose music has filled the campus this afternoon:

- Meredith Douglas-Moore, Littleton, Colorado
- Alexandra Frank, Toronto, Canada
- Justin Watkins, Kingsport
- Westley (correct spelling) Harris, Copperhill
- Will Bledsoe, Jonesborough

- Jane MacMorran (pronounced mick-MORE-uhn), Director of the Appalachian, Scottish, and Irish Studies Program and Director of the Celtic Band

Today we celebrate East Tennessee State University—our students, faculty, staff, and everyone in the community who have contributed their time, energy, and talents to make this such a vibrant, energetic, and rewarding place to study, teach, research, and serve.

Today is also a day to remember the past, celebrate the present, and dream collective of a new vision for ETSU. Reminders of the past are all around us. Across the lawn is Carter Hall, which stands in lasting tribute to the family of our founder, George L. Carter. Without his dedication and vision we would not be here. Carter’s vision for the region and the role of higher education to transform communities runs through the heart of this institution and strikes at the core of our historic mission to serve the needs of Appalachia.

Today we honor the notable heroes of our history and their commitments of time and service to ETSU.

Today we pay homage to individuals such as our first president, Sidney Gilbreath, under whose leadership we witnessed the growth of the institution, the advent of intercollegiate athletics, and a focus on providing a moral compass for our students. We also honor leaders such as Dr. D.P Culp, for whom the student center behind us is named, Dr. Roy Nicks who built the new Sherrod Library and affirmed a culture in which students are at the center of our focus.

We also honor our past president, Dr. Paul Stanton, a consummate gentleman; someone who is humble, dedicated to both his God and family, and committed to serving others first. Dr. Stanton is one of the great presidents in American higher education and I thank him for all that he has done and will continue to do for ETSU.

In my conversations with alumni and friends, I am reminded daily of the contributions of these public leaders, as well as the countless faculty and staff who are the engines who power the institution, which serves as a vehicle to transform our region. I share their passion and am humbled by the opportunity to serve this great institution and the individuals who comprise its family. I thank each of you for welcoming my family into yours. In short order, we have gained a deep sense of belonging and purpose at ETSU. I would like to take a moment to introduce my wife, Donna, who is the love of my life. I thank you for bringing me back to your home state and for all that you will do as we walk this path together as a team.

I encourage you to take time in the days ahead to look around you and come to an even deeper appreciation of the greatness of this institution. We can point to the accomplishments of faculty, staff, alumni, and our friends in the community whose philanthropic gifts

have transformed ETSU. Their generosity signifies the commitment of leaders across the region to our future. Countless lives have been touched by their generosity, and all parts of the university are strengthened through their acts of grace. Their gifts make this a better place.

Over the course of the Spring semester, I have been humbled by the countless stories of dedication, commitment, and pride that are exhibited by our faculty and staff. However, I have been struck by the fact that we often take ETSU for granted. We take for granted the role and impact that we have in the community. I hope that in the years to come we can change the conversation, for we have come a long way from our roots as a normal school and have much to be proud of. According to a recent report by our Bureau of Business and Economic Research, we contribute \$683 million to the regional economy, and we are directly responsible for the creation of more than 5,200 full-time jobs in East Tennessee.

We are the engine that drives economic and cultural creativity. Across the institution, there is a strong desire, bordering on impatience, for educational excellence that drives us forward. It is from this solid foundation, a foundation created on the shoulders of giants, that we will build.

Over the next few months, we will continue conversations of dreaming a new future for ETSU. These conversations embody hope for the community. We have no bounds on our potential. Our dedication to the region establishes a promise of hope, aspiration, and a commitment to ensure that the generations that follow us have a better future. Through the pursuit of the life of the mind, we create a community with greater meaning, purpose, prosperity, knowledge, and self-worth that comes from the pursuit of higher education. Such a future is borne of a collective vision emerging from the roots of ETSU.

By working together, we can overcome any obstacle. We have the drive to achieve and the independence as a community of scholars to accomplish greatness. When state and national civic forces conspired against us, we stood firm as a community and built a college of medicine and later a college of pharmacy. When we put our minds together as a community, we can accomplish anything, and this tradition of creativity, ingenuity, and independence will allow us to reach new heights. We will build upon our strengths, sharpen our mission, and achieve the impossible.

Over the course of the next three to five years, we will embark together on a diversity of initiatives that will stretch our horizons. We will begin building a Center for the Fine and Performing Arts. Later this summer, we will begin work to transform the campus by turning the core of campus to green space, thereby creating a great lawn that welcomes students. During the

2012-13 academic year, we will re-engineer the amphitheater that we share today, modernizing a classic venue for the 21st Century.

Beginning this summer, we will examine issues related to structure, relationships, and affiliations within our athletic department so that it can take its place as the front porch of the university. We will make improvements to the Dome that will enhance the game day experience next season, and we will examine potential new programs.

Concurrently, we must reaffirm our values, for the core of the institution resides in our undergraduate curricula. We have world-class faculty and staff across all facets of ETSU, and we must take steps to ensure that they have access to world class technology and facilities so that they can excel in both instruction and research, and are compensated in accordance with the market. In the upcoming academic year, we will make investments in the equity plan and,

assuming the economy continues to improve, will initiate a multi-year commitment to this plan.

You will hear me talking about music on this campus quite often. Donna and I have been deeply impressed with the student and faculty musical performances we have attended at ETSU. Music brings out the spirit and soul of a campus. Today, it gives me great pleasure to announce a new concert series that will begin next fall, with a major concert to be scheduled at the onset of the fall semester. That will be followed by two more concerts and then another major concert at Homecoming.

We must be willing to test and stretch ourselves. We may not reach our broad goals, but we cannot be complacent. There is no upward limit on the power of higher education.

In 1961, President John F. Kennedy issued a broad goal, one that many thought was impossible: to put a man on the moon by the end of the decade. Through the power and ingenuity of research, we met his goal. We are now in a race to the future, with the results determining who will lead our world in the generations to come. Will America remain as the global leader, or will we be passed by emerging nations who are investing heavily in higher education and research?

What is at stake is our children's future. We are in a competition for economic stability, one in which our future will be based upon intellect, creativity, and independence. ETSU's role in this race lies in our ability to prepare students for a diverse and international marketplace. The foundation of success for a new ETSU must reach beyond respective colleges and requires an interdisciplinary approach. Each of us possesses great gifts; what separates us is how we use them.

To succeed, we must open our minds. Success requires stamina and the boldness to overcome adversity. It requires a relentless dedication of heart, mind, and soul to educational excellence. We must have strong-willed stubbornness to succeed. The terrain before us is uncertain. We have all witnessed the decline of state and federal support for higher education. However, rather than lamenting this condition, we must return to the independent willpower that created the Colleges of Medicine and Pharmacy and drive a new future for ETSU.

Concurrently, we must work together as an institution to focus on what matters most, our students. Our students have the passion and energy to lead. They are the future. We must play a major role in capturing the minds of our students and instill in them the passion for learning. We must develop them fully and help them to realize their dreams so that they can dominate in a world defined by intellectual capacities.

We must also bring more people into higher education, and we must redouble our efforts to ensure that more students are successful in their pursuit of college degrees. Recent statistics indicate that of every 100 ninth graders in Tennessee, 67 will graduate from high school, 43 will enter college, but only 19 will ultimately graduate from college. Here at ETSU, of every 100 freshmen who start their educational journey, only 46 graduate within six years. I challenge each of you to dedicate your energies over the summer to envisioning possibilities to improve these statistics.

This spring we have met with faculty and staff from across our eleven colleges and forty-eight academic units. This effort has been geared at listening and beginning a conversation about the future of ETSU. Later this spring, we will launch a visioning initiative that will create a blueprint for ETSU at our 125th anniversary.

As we move into this new era and as we grow, I hope that we do not lose touch with our history, mission, and heritage. There is much to be proud of at ETSU. Did you know that...?

- ETSU is an All-Steinway School, allowing music students from across the nation and around the world to develop their skills and talents here in East Tennessee. With music as an ETSU calling card, we should aspire to be viewed as “the Juilliard of the South.”
- The latest *U.S. News & World Report* rankings list the Quillen College of Medicine fifth in the nation for rural medicine.
- Fourteen of our alumni have gone on to attain the rank of general or admiral.
- The Gray Fossil Site is home to the greatest number of tapirs found at any single location in the world, and the research

being conducted by our faculty in the Department of Geosciences has brought international fame to ETSU.

- Through our PASTA program, we provide access to technology for rural and underprivileged schools across the region, truly opening the minds of students to the amazing power of learning via technology.
- We shape the future in so many ways here at ETSU. I am inspired by the work of Dr. Wally Dixon, his colleagues, and students in the Department of Psychology. They are studying “pre-verbal infants” to determine factors that cause them to become overweight in later infancy and toddlerhood. Childhood obesity is a major and serious problem in this country. At ETSU, we are doing something about it.

- We are partnering with Sullivan County and Kingsport on a new STEM platform school, made possible through a \$1.5 million grant from the state of Tennessee to advance science, technology, engineering, and mathematics.
- We brought in \$49 million in 2010-11 for research and sponsored program activity. We are witnessing tremendous growth in undergraduate and graduate research, as evidenced by the fact that participation in our annual Appalachian Student Research Forum grew by 40 percent in one year.

This is just a sampling of the groundbreaking and inspiring work underway here at ETSU. Our faculty and staff should be applauded for all of their work and accomplishments. With their support, we are the vehicle that opens doors of opportunity for first-generation students; we are the institution of choice for our region's doctors, teachers, artists, and entrepreneurs.

Clearly we are making a difference in the region, but we must do a better job of measuring and celebrating our impact. That is a challenge that we must both embrace and quantify. We have the power to transform the region. That is the power of ETSU, and, in time, this will allow everyone in the region to feel the pride for ETSU that you exemplify on a daily basis. I look forward to the day when the region is painted blue and gold rather than black, yellow, green, or orange.

Let us now turn our attention again to our founders and their values that helped build this great institution. At ETSU, we serve the hard-working people of Tennessee. We are not a city on the hill; we are the people who built the hill. We are an institution of dedicated individuals who work quietly to create a better future for our students. Today, we celebrate their service, and honor those who are committed to the life of the mind.

Over the course of the Spring semester, we have sought nominations for a new award at ETSU, focused on dedication and service to our students. This award is named in recognition of Dr. Bert C. Bach, someone who has dedicated his life to higher education and creating an environment in which we strive to go above and beyond the call of duty to help students persist to graduation. Through the coordination of a small team led by Fred Sauceman, nominations were sought for those individuals (faculty, staff, and student) who possess a deep commitment to student success.

The individual selected for the inaugural Bach Servant Leadership Award has served as an advisor in the College of Business and Technology for over twenty years. This person has advised, counseled, and be-friended thousands of students. He cares deeply about the academic success of our students. Students in the college oftentimes “stay with it” because they do not want to

disappoint our honoree. When leaders of the College of Business and Technology visit alumni, his name always rises to the top.

This individual was an active participant in the ETSU Centennial Steering Committee, and, in 1986, he helped bury the 75th anniversary time capsule. In 2011, he helped open it while also coordinating all of the materials that were buried in the Centennial capsule.

At this time, I would like for Joe Trujillo, owner of Johnson City Honda and a true friend of ETSU, to come forward and assist with the award. I would also like for Dr. Bach to come forward.

Joe: it is with great honor that I announce that Mr. Tim Dills is the recipient of the inaugural Bert C. Bach Servant Leadership award. Tim will receive a new 2012 Honda Civic for the next two

years. The car is located across the lawn. Any comments you want to make about ETSU.

(Moment for Tim to speak.)

Spring is a time of renewal and reflection. In the days to come, we will celebrate the successes of our students. From here they become our alumni. Our students are the passion that drives us. I encourage our students to become engaged. You get out of this journey only what you put into it. Do not take it for granted. Enjoy the life of the mind and enjoy your time at college. Your ability to define a better future for yourself is predicated on your dedication to yourself and your community.

I thank each of you for taking time to attend this celebration today, and may God bless each of you as we travel on this transformational journey together.

